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ROYAL POWER AND ECCLESIASTICAL PATRONAGE  
IN THE KINGDOM OF MERCA  
DURING THE EIGHTH-CENTURY  
716-821

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the royal patronage of Mercian minsters and monasteries during the eighth-century and its illustration of the authority of the Mercian kings. It examines the surviving royal charters which provide the bulk of the evidence for royal grants. It is only through the use of these documents that one can get some idea of the rights and privileges the Church received and what services the Church had rendered in order to gain them.

The diplomatic evidence is unevenly distributed through the kingdom, with the church of Worcester being by far the best represented. Thus, it is possible to examine the limits of both royal and ecclesiastical authority in some detail.

Unfortunately, the surviving evidence for the rest of the kingdom is not as plentiful. Therefore, it is not possible to examine the king's relationship with each ecclesiastical centre in as much detail as is possible with Worcester. For this reason, the remaining diplomatic evidence for the kingdom is treated as a whole, to see whether it conforms to the pattern set by Worcester. Thus, it is possible to suggest that either the Mercian kings had a policy which applied to all the minsters and abbeys within the kingdom, or if they treated each ecclesiastical centre on an individual basis.



I Edward Tomlinson Fort hereby certify that this dissertation which is approximately 25,000 words in length has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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I was admitted as a candidate for the degree of M.Litt. on 1 October, 1985; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St. Andrews between 1985 and 1987.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANS. Anglo-Norman Studies.

ASC. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

ASE. Anglo-Saxon England.

Bede, Epist. Epistulum ad Egbertum.

Bede, HE. Historia Ecclesiastica; cited by book and chapter number.

Bede, VA. Vitae Abbatum; cited by chapter number.

BNJ. British Numismatic Journal.

Boniface, Epist. The Letters of St. Boniface, ed. E. Emerton, Columbia University Records of Civilization 31(1940), no.57, pp.124-130.

Chron. E. Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham, Ed. W.D. Macray (London, 1863).

CS. Cartularium Saxonicum, ed. W. deG. Birch (London, 1885-1899); cited by number.

EHR. English Historical Review.

OV. Orderic Vitalis, The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis, ed. M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1969-1980); cited by book, chapter, and section number.

S. P. Sawyer, Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography (London, 1968); cited by number.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the eighth-century, the kingdom of Mercia dominated most of the other English kingdoms located south of the river Humber. Many historians, most notably Sir Frank Stenton, have examined the Mercian hegemony and its influence upon the political development of the southern kingdoms. Some research has also been done on the relationship between the eighth-century kings and the Church. However, most of these inquiries have dealt with King Offa's relations with the church of Canterbury, which was not a Mercian see, and the temporary creation of a metropolitan see at Lichfield. Little research has been done concerning the relationship between the Mercian kings and those ecclesiastical centres within Mercia itself.

From 716 to 821 Mercia was well governed by three kings; Aethelbald (716-757), Offa (757-796), and Coenwulf (796-821). For this 105 year span, a fairly substantial amount of evidence has survived. Aside from the political history it provides, it also reveals to the modern researcher a general idea of each king's attitude toward and treatment of the Church.

King Aethelbald has the worst reputation in the eyes of the Church among the three monarchs. St. Boniface, in a letter to the king, reproved him for illegally seizing church lands as well as seducing nuns. Boniface's source is unknown, but Aethelbald is not credited with any ecclesiastical foundations, which would suggest that his attitude toward Church affairs may have been one of indifference. Nevertheless, Felix, in his Life of St. Guthlac of Crowland, praised Aethelbald for providing the saint with a magnificent tomb. Felix does not mention any abuses against the Church and is only full of praise for Aethelbald. Both Boniface and Felix wrote while Aethelbald was alive, thus they probably represent views of the king derived from very different sources.

King Offa's reputation is much better than that of his predecessor, and this despite the fact that St. Aethelberht, king of East Anglia, was executed on Offa's orders in 794. Offa is credited with founding Westminster, St. Albans, and Winchcombe. Other important minsters and monasteries, such as Bredon and Worcester, made efforts to preserve records that they had benefited from his patronage. However, Offa was not above using the Church for his own political purposes and, upon occasion, probably forced churchmen to comply with his policies. This was the case in the establishment of the archbishopric of Lichfield.

King Coenwulf seems to have been more accomodating with the Church. He reversed Offa's unpopular move and had Lichfield reduced to episcopal status. He is also credited with the foundation, or perhaps refoundation, of Winchcombe. He does not seem to have twisted the arm of the church, to have it comply with his political wishes, as much as his predecessors had done.

This dissertation will be a study of the royal patronage received by the Mercian church during the period between the accession of Aethelbald and the death of Coenwulf. It will be a study of how the Church benefitted from the grants of land and the privileges which were made directly by the Mercian kings themselves, or with their approval.

Since most of the evidence for these grants has survived in the form of royal charters, this study will begin with a detailed examination of early Anglo-Saxon diplomas. It will assess the type, or types, of land tenure that these documents illustrate and the benefits and responsibilities the Church acquired when it was granted an estate.

This study will then examine how each individual Mercian church and abbey benefitted from royal patronage. The ecclesiastical centres covered in this survey will only be those within the borders of Mercia (itself), defined as the area between the Thames and Humber rivers and excluding the

counties of Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk.

Finally, this dissertation will attempt to show how the royal patronage of the Church illustrates the relationship between the Church and the monarchy. It will show to what extent the Church was dependent upon the monarchy for its wealth and the degree of independence and freedom of action enjoyed by the Church under the limitations of royal control.



## CHAPTER ONE

### Mercian Charters and Their Criticism

In any study dealing with royal patronage of ecclesiastical institutions in the pre-Viking age, one must accept the fact that the bulk of the evidence survives in the form of royal charters. All other forms of evidence, whether chronicles, saints' lives, or church histories, are to one extent or another secondary. It is only the royal Anglo-Saxon diploma which goes directly to the heart of the matter and provides a record of the king's generosity to the Church.

Unfortunately, Anglo-Saxon charters are not easy historical sources to use. In their form they are unique in Western Europe. They contain no outward sign of authentication, seals, autograph crosses, autograph subscriptions, or the scribe's name. Their construction is not that of a public act issued from some type of royal chancery but rather that of a private deed that is primitive and religious in its form. The text, subscriptions, and signa are almost always the work of one scribe. Even those charters with manual signs stated to have been made by the witnesses are the work of one scribe.[1]

The earliest diplomas are ecclesiastical documents. The general consensus among Anglo-Saxon diplomatists is that they were introduced into England (or more precisely Kent) by Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury (c.668-690). This hypothesis rests on the fact that the earliest authentic charters date from the reign of King Hlothhere of Kent (673-685);[2] however, there has been some argument that it was Archbishop Augustine (597-604), or one of his companions, who first brought the charter to the English.[3] The question of when the charter arrived in the British Isles is inconsequential to this study, what is more important is the religious character of the charter.

The earliest charters were written in uncial and majuscule scripts, forms of handwriting normally reserved for sacred books. There are also associations of charters with gospel books and ceremonies at the altars of major churches. For example, an agreement between Archbishop AEthelheard of Canterbury and Abbess Cynethryth of Cookham in Berkshire records that when King AEthelbald granted an estate to Canterbury, "he sent a sod from the same land and all the deeds of the afore-mentioned monastery by the venerable man Archbishop Cuthberht, and ordered them to be laid upon the altar of the Saviour for his salvation." [4]

Charters were also religious in their form. A diploma began with a verbal and sometimes pictorial appeal to "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour." Such invocations were not unique to early English diplomas. They were also used by Pope Gregory I (590-604), who was the founder of the Kentish church, and Gregory himself seems to have borrowed them from the legislation of the Emperor Justinian (527-565). [5]

The entreaty to Christ was followed by a proem which consisted of either a statement of the value of written grants over oral ones or a discourse on the brevity of life and the need for man to expiate his sins and consider the after-life. After this came the dispositio, the grant itself. These are usually made from the first person (Ego...rex) to the second (tibi...tuoque monasterio) in Mercian charters. Next, came the immunity clause, which was followed by a description of the boundaries of the estate. The anathema usually followed. This consisted of a statement warning any possible violators of the grant of the punishment they would receive on Judgement day. On this point they were unlike continental charters which also meted out secular penalties to those who infringed upon the grant. The charter concluded with a statement of its date and a list of witnesses.

The witness list always included the name of at least one important bishop, if not more. In Kent no charter was valid without the consent of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the witness lists of Mercian charters were usually headed by the bishops of Lichfield and Leicester.

The ecclesiastical form of diplomas can also be seen in secular grants. King Aethelbald granted an estate to one Cyneburg, who does not appear to have been an ecclesiastic, "for the redemption of my soul." [6] King Offa made a similar grant to Dudda, minister, on account of his (Offa's) "love for the heavenly kingdom and for the redemption of my soul." [7] Since it is unlikely that either of these grants had any religious motivation, it seems probable that the drafters put in the religious formulas out of custom. Thus, despite the fact that charters were being granted to laymen by the mid-eighth century, they still remained ecclesiastical documents in their form.

It was because of the ecclesiastical (and thus sacred) nature of the royal charter that the Anglo-Saxons never seemed to have been aware that the authority of a diploma could be challenged. It was assumed that one had title to the land granted if one possessed the charter. This accounts for the lack of means of authentication, as mentioned above, but it also means that it would have been quite easy for later scribes to embellish or forge early grants. Thus, the modern researcher needs to distinguish between genuine grants and later forgeries.

In the mid-1960s P. Chaplais developed a terminology for charter criticism which broke the diplomas into four basic groups. [8] The first group were originals, which were identified as being charters written in a contemporary hand, on a single sheet of parchment, and having no spurious features. Apparent originals comprised the next category and these were single sheet charters which, due to insufficient paleographical or diplomatic analysis, could not be placed in any other group. Copies, formed the third grouping, these were charters with no suspicious features

but which had survived only in a non-contemporary script. The final group forgeries, and these were diplomas in which any attempt at deception was made.

Later forgeries are something which the Anglo-Saxon historian must be able to evaluate. While some forgeries, such as those for Crowland abbey, are of no historical value, others may provide valuable pieces of information. There are several reasons why mediaeval monks would either embellish or create eighth-century documents.

Some forgeries were intended to represent a stage in the supposed history of an ecclesiastical institution which had not been covered by the existing documentary evidence. Others were intended to show that a religious house had certain privileges, such as an exemption from certain public burdens. Forgeries could also be drawn-up in order to settle disputes between religious houses over property or those concerning jurisdiction of authority. It must however be remembered that the absence of any known motive for a forgery does not necessarily add any favour to the argument toward the authenticity of a document.

Due to the problem of forged charters, scholars since the nineteenth-century have been developing means by which the imitations may be detected. One way of doing this is by an examination of the handwriting. Early charters were written in uncial script, which would seem to be easy to distinguish, but this is not always the case. Two pieces of work written in the same year, by two different scribes may look generations apart because of such factors as the age of the scribes or the places of origin of the documents.

One portion of a diploma which was frequently tampered with was the boundary clause. In the eighth-century, these clauses were in Latin and always brief as the following translated example indicates: "on the other side of the above named river [the Stour], having on its northern side the

wood which they call Kinver and on the west another of which [who's] name is Morfe." [9]. In these texts the bounds are restricted to four sides, following the model of the late Roman private deed.

It was not until the ninth-century that the clauses were expanded and came to be written in the vernacular. Even so, it would be unwise to assume that boundary clauses were contemporary with the diploma in which they appeared and any appended clause, such as the ones in S.115 and S.174, was always suspect.

The hand of the forger may sometimes be detected in the dating clause of a charter. The earliest authentic diplomas were usually dated either by the indiction or by the regnal year of the king. It was the Northumbrian historian Bede who popularized the use of the annus Domini; therefore, any charter dated before c.735 is immediately suspect. The earliest trustworthy diploma to use the year of the incarnation is a grant of King Aethelbald which is dated 736. [10] This diploma survives in contemporary form and is thus a strong indication of when the then new dating system began to be used. Eventually the annus Domini came to eclipse the other dating systems in importance and by the middle of King Offa's reign the regnal year had almost completely disappeared from charters.

The indiction number, on the other hand, remained, but by Coenwulf's reign, at the latest, it seems to have been copied mechanically from a column next to the year of grace on a Dionysiac table. This seems to have been done without any thought of its significance since, in the table, both systems begin on 25 December, when the indiction should have begun in September.

One final way of checking authenticity is to examine the names on a charter's witness list. The names of witnesses must have been those of people who could have witnessed the document. There exists, for example, a forged charter of King Ine of Wessex, which contains a witness list taken

from a charter of King Aethelbald of Mercia.[11]

The aforementioned should not lead one to consider that detecting forged charters is not difficult work. Many surviving documents present special difficulties and a glance through Peter Sawyer's Handlist soon reveals how diverse the opinions are over many diplomas. Therefore, the conclusions that are reached regarding the use of these diplomas may be just as diverse.

It is generally accepted, however, that seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-century charters were drawn up by their recipients. They were not the creation of any type of royal chancellory, but rather of the religious houses which had received royal favour. Some historians, such as Eric John and Sir Frank Stenton, have argued that there were different formulae used by different ecclesiastics on a national basis. Thus, there would be Mercian, West Saxon, and Kentish formulas.

All of these types had the same basic model and communicated the same ideas but they did so with different formulas. The break-up of charter formulae along national lines is probably too general. Since it is presumed that the diplomas were drawn up by their recipients, it is far more likely that each religious house had its own set of formulas to draw upon.

Prof. Brooks has pointed out that, beginning in the late eighth-century, the charters for Christ Church mention the common burdens with increasing frequency, but such was not the case with those for Rochester.[12] Both churches were located in Kent and were in relatively close proximity toward one another. Despite these similarities, they still used different formulas. Thus, it seems that the formula styles varied between religious houses rather than on the basis of political boundaries; therefore they were local and not national products.



All early charters, in one way or another, dealt with land. According to Bede, the basic unit for the measurement of land used by the English was terra unius familiae (the land of one family), or enough land for the support of one family.[13] In the Old English vernacular, this unit was expressed as a hide (hid or hiwisc). The exact size and extent of the primitive familia has been a matter of considerable debate and, according to the more traditional view, the familia was the extended family. Thus the hide consisted of several farms held by a group of kinsmen.

There seems to have been no exact measurement of the area of one hide. But there may have been a convention that a "long-hundred acres" (120 acres) of arable land was described as a hide over much of the country. This size was far from uniform, however, since in more prosperous areas, land of considerably smaller acreage could also be considered sufficient.[14]

On the other hand, many nineteenth-century scholars, such as F.W. Maitland, have argued that the hide was not a measurement of land but a unit of taxation. Citing support in Ine's law code where it was noted that a uniform feorm (a provision or tax due the king) was to be paid for every ten hides.[15] Since the feorm was uniform, the area which produced it cannot have been. Therefore the hide assessment must have been set independently of area or value. It must have been determined by the amount of feorm and the amount of service that a king believed he could expect from any given holding.[16]

Another, more recent view, argues that the English idea of the hide changed from an economic unit to one of land measurement. This view states that when Bede defined a hide as encompassing the land of one family, he was not referring to the extended family, but rather to the nuclear family.

The same idea is also found in early charters where the conventional phraseology of land grants-terram trium cassatorum...largitus sum (I grant the land of three hides), seems to be referring more to people than to land. But, beginning in Wessex in the late seventh-century, and moving into Mercia in the eighth- and ninth centuries, the phraseology of the charters changed. The new construction, "I grant...x hides of land"[17], signified that the hide had now become a measurement of land.[18] Exactly when this change occurred is difficult to determine. In Mercia the old style seems to have lasted until the later part of the eighth-century, and in Wessex, where the new construction began, the old meaning was still preserved.[19]

While it is agreed that the royal diplomas deal with land, exactly what the king was granting has been a matter of considerable contention. In the eighth-century the charter was still a relatively new legal instrument and the drafters of these documents must have used caution. The phrases which the scribes employed were acquired from foreign models and they were as simple as their purposes would allow.[20] The scribes did not travel far from a factual record of the matter at hand: It must be stressed that the charters say what they mean, there were no hidden complexities behind the documents.

From its establishment in Kent at the end of the sixth-century, the Church was endowed with land and it was from land that it was supported. There are no records of early endowments of money. Any major ecclesiastical centre needed a substantial initial grant of land to ensure a sufficient continuity of income and to sustain an uninterrupted life. By the mid-eighth-century, however, payments to the Church, such as soul-scot, plough-alms, and free offerings were enjoined upon the population, yet the payment of tithes remained voluntary, despite the fact that in 787 the papal legates had decreed that all men must pay them.[21] In Mercia, most payments were probably made in kind since minting activity seems to have been confined to the south-eastern portion of Britain (London, Canterbury,



Rochester, and East Anglia) and the coins themselves most likely represented denominations beyond the reach of most people.[22]

It is almost certain that early grants were not endowments of uncultivated land which the churchmen would have had to work for a living. The greater churches must have received estates as going concerns. The most famous example of this is the estate at Selsey which King Aethelwealh of Sussex gave to Bishop Wilfred.[23] The estate included worked fields, free men and 250 male and female slaves, all of whom Wilfred baptised and freed. For the eighth-century there is a series of charters concerning estates near Droitwich in Worcestershire which deal with salt-houses already in production.[24]

For legal purposes, at least from the early tenth-century, all land in England, whether cultivated or not, was classified into two groups: folkland and bookland. The former was the land of the kindred. It was subject to all secular burdens and could not be transferred outside of the family. It is not known how common this type of land was in England. There are very few references to it and none in any source dated before the mid-ninth-century. The term was probably never commonly used and the folkland itself seems to have been rapidly disappearing by the ninth-century.[25]

The nature of bookland, however, is much more complex and contentious among Anglo-Saxonists. Its general definition is that it was land held according to the privileges stated in a charter. Most importantly, this included the right to transfer the estate to anyone of the owner's choosing. In this way it was different from folkland which could only be transferred with the approval of the kindred.

It was bookland that the Church desired and received. The earliest known English royal prerogative was the power to confer book-right upon a favoured church or subject. Therefore, if a religious foundation was to

survive, it would need royal favour, otherwise it would be unable to secure permanent endowments of land. The subservience of the English Church upon the monarchy was firmly rooted in the economic dependence of the former upon the latter.[26]

The evidence suggests that, at first, only churchmen could receive book-right. Bede, in his famous letter to his former pupil, Egbert, Archbishop of York, described how many lay magnates were prepared to turn their households into psuedo-monasteries in order to obtain what Bede refers to as ius ecclesiasticum. [27] Eventually this custom changed and from the reign of King Offa there are records of secular men and women legitimately receiving charters from the king. [28] At about the same time, private charters began to come into use. But these never claimed to create book-right, although they did make use of the power of alienation conferred by a diploma. [29]

Eric John and others have argued that bookright was normally purchased from the king by the Church. Bede, again, seems to confirm this idea. In his letter to Egbert, he stated that the creators of fraudulent monasteries had to purchase the hereditary right from the king, thus implying that legitimate churchmen also had to make similar payments. [30] John also notes that King Aethelred's charter for the foundation of Gloucester Abbey, if it can be trusted, gave a high price that had to be paid the king for the privilege of booking the land. [31]

Some of the English kings may indeed have had a policy about the amount of land that could be granted by charter. Bede, again, noted that the excessive granting of estates to the churchs of Northumbria, legitimate or otherwise, had led to a shortage of estates available for the sons of nobles or veteran thegns. [32] It has been argued, that this undermined the authority of the Northumbrian kings and contributed to the instability of the kingdom during the eighth- and ninth-centuries. John also believes that there may have been a deliberate policy by the Mercian kings not to

grant indiscriminately estates to the Church.[33] This may be true, but because the charter, not to mention the literary, evidence for much of Mercia is so sparse, it is difficult to argue either for or against this idea.

There are four basic views on the nature of bookland and what exactly it was that the king was granting to the Church. All have their defenders and all make good use of the surviving charter evidence. But it has already been said that one does not own land in the same manner that one owns an overcoat[34] and the same is true about land tenure in the eighth-century. No one form of tenure could possibly have existed at all places at all times and because of the shortage of evidence, it would be unwise to commit oneself wholeheartedly to any one theory.

According to the more conservative view, bookland was land which was immune from various duties owed to the king. The early charters drawn up before c.750, did not necessarily convey ownership of the land, but rather superiority over lands and men. Bookland could, and in the case of Northumbria did, deprive the king of the necessary means to attract followers. This was especially true since the king lost the use and/or benefits of bookland forever. In diplomas the usual term for landed rights in early texts was ius perpetuum (eternal right). This term, and its variants (the most common being ius ecclesiasticum) expressed the Church's determination to hold on to what the king granted to it.

Unfortunately, this theory has had some pointed criticism. Patrick Wormald has demonstrated that Bede commented that young men were leaving Northumbria because of a lack of land, not a lack of service. The duties and services owed the king from estates seem to have remained. If the king was granting exemptions to certain public burdens, such as bridge work, the scribes probably would have recorded the immunities in the grant. Such was the practice in Frankish charters where the benefactors always stated the immunities involved. Thus, to argue that the original essence of bookland

was exemption from normal obligations, is to say that the early drafters of charters were unable to convey their meaning when they could easily have done so.[35]

A second view of bookland has been proposed by historians such as J.E.A. Jolliffe.[36] It asserts that bookland destroyed the family entailment of the folkland. Bookland made it possible for land which normally would have remained within a kindred to pass to the Church. This is why the charters stress the perpetuity of the grant and the beneficiary's freedom to do as he liked with it; including posthumous bequest.

Once again, problems with that thesis have been pointed out. Jolliffe's argument does not explain why the presence of the king and his witan was needed to create bookland. Most early grants are royal, and if such grants were those of immunities then it would be understandable for them to be public acts since they would be in the public interest. But, according to this argument such was not the case, therefore it is difficult to see why the king and his councillors were needed in actions which only involved families. Moreover, this thesis does not take into account Bede's use of the term ius haereditarium when he described what the lay nobles were seeking when they turned their homes into false-monasteries. If bookright was supposed to break up hereditary right, why does Bede use this term to describe it?[37]

The third view of bookland is that argued by Eric John in his two monographs on Anglo-Saxon land tenure.[38] John sees royal diplomas as grants of power, not land. Their formulas outline the main powers conferred, or at least those of particular interest to the drafters of the document. In this respect he differs from people such as F.W. Maitland, and others holding the orthodox view, who were of the opinion that the charters on occasion did convey ownership.[39] According to John, bookright was either invented or introduced into England by churchmen who were

familiar with both Vulgar Roman law and contemporary Church law.

The best example of this is the term ius ecclesiasticum. This phrase was often used for bookright and it continued to be used well into the period when lay men could receive bookland. It was, at no time, a term with exclusively religious connotations.

In John's argument it was the Church which brought a new form of land tenure into Britain - bookright. The central thread of meaning was the creation of a ius perpetuum (eternal right) which was equivalent to a ius ecclesiasticum (ecclesiastical right) and which gave the receiver libertas (freedom) and propria potestas (special power). The receiver of ius perpetuum acquired the power to dispose of a booked estate by any means he desired, especially by means of bequest. This made bookright unique in that it was hereditary.

Using the available evidence, most of it in the form of heroic poetry, John states that kings could and often did revoke warrior's property when possible and appropriate. Bookland changed this situation, first for the Church and later for the lay magnates. It created a perpetual and unrestricted tenure of land. For the nobility, it did not take the land out of the family, as Jolliffe argues; quite the contrary, it brought land into the family. The powers of bequest and alienation granted by royal charter were intended to remove land from royal power for all time, not to remove it from the family. This also explains why royal resources could be exhausted and why noblemen would bother to set themselves up as abbots. This likewise illustrates why the sanctio clauses of royal diplomas threaten kings and their successors and not the recipient's kinsmen.

As with other theories, John's has not found universal acceptance. His argument that the Church introduced the whole idea of inherited property to the English strains one's credulity and does not take into account all of the evidence. Both archaeological and written sources

record that the first Saxons arrived in Britain as mercenaries during the Roman occupation of the island. Assuming that they had no concept of inherited property, they surely would have acquired it for the Romans and Britons.

Also, other Germanic sources, such as the Lex Salica, speak of hereditary tenure. Bede, in his Lives of the Abbots, demonstrates that Benedict Biscop regarded hereditary succession as the worldly norm.[40] There are also early charters that never speak of a ius haereditarium. [41] They emphasized the recipient's freedom of disposition where there was no idea of hereditary entitlement, even though a grant's intention was that the land should go permanently to the Church.[42]

In an attempt to find solutions to the problems of the three previous theories of the nature of early land tenure, Patrick Wormald has formulated his own. He draws a distinction between two types of property; inherited and acquired. The former was land which one inherited from one's kin, this land could not be alienated from the family. The latter consisted of land acquired in any form but inheritance and thus could be distributed at one's pleasure.

In England there was a conflicting situation of land tenure. The Church desired permanent possession in principle and by definition, but the kings wanted to reclaim donations made to warriors when they died or were unsatisfactory in their service. The various families involved wanted their heritage to remain intact. The warrior nobility wanted more land than they already had in the hope of handing it down to their heirs, but not necessarily their wider families.

The great value of the diploma was that it granted perpetual right and was also proof of acquisition and consequently the recipient had the right to choose its eventual destination. Bookland gave acquired land all the characteristics of inherited land with the important difference that it



eliminated the claims of the kin beyond those chosen as the recipient's heirs. This makes it possible for one to understand why there was such a demand for bookland in Northumbria and why Bede calls it ius haereditarium.

The charters created a new type of hereditary right, they did not create hereditary tenure. They introduced the idea of perpetual and unrestricted donation and thereby blurred the distinction between hereditary and acquired land. This was the reason why early charters stress perpetuity and freedom of disposition, and why it was the king's successors and not the grantee's family who were threatened by the anathema.[43]

If Wormald's theory is correct, and there is much to be said for it, then early charters were in all probability grants of ownership of land. Grants of immunities, such as exemption from taxation, came later. The introduction of immunity clauses led to a change in the type of land tenure seen in charters. Earlier grants, those made before c.750, were grants of ownership. Most, if not all, churches still had to render the same duties that secular landholders did. However, in the eighth-century this changed.

The change can be dated to about 749, in Mercia, for in that year King Aethelbald issued a charter granting exemptions from all public taxations to all the monasteries and churches in his kingdom.[44] From this date grants of immunities became quite common and it was no longer wise to assume that royal diplomas were grants of ownership, since they may have been grants of power instead.

Political authority was now conferred by charter. It consisted of the diversions of the products of taxation from the king to a favoured subject. For example, a charter from King Offa to the Church of Worcester freed the church from all exactions of either kings or nobles, save the common burdens.[45]

Similar grants could also be made to laymen. In a grant to Osberht, his minister, Offa gave the estate "with all tribute which was formerly given to kings and as long as you continue in this life all these things shall be subject to your power." [46] Nevertheless, all such grants were made only by the king, for the booking of land remained a royal prerogative since only the king had the power to alienate his own rights.

As was illustrated by the first of the two examples above, the Mercian kings did not grant away all of their rights. In a charter in favour of the Church of Worcester, Offa freed the estate "from all compulsion of kings and ealdormen... except these taxes; that is the tribute of Westbury, two tuns full of pure ale and a coomb full of mild ale and a coomb full of Welsh ale, and seven oxen and six wethers and forty cheeses and six long weru, and thirty ambers of unground corn and four ambers of meal." [47] This diploma is the only surviving list of the amount of tribute that a king could draw from an estate as his feorm. The fact that similar statements do not occur in other such documents probably means that such practices were uncommon.

The one set of immunities which the Mercian kings do not seem to have granted were those of bridge and fortress repair and also military service. A supposed grant of King Caedwalla of Wessex to Bishop Wilfrid uses the term trimoda necessitas to refer to these burdens, [48] and the term whilst probably not common among the English is now used by historians. Exactly when these burdens were first placed upon estates granted by charters has been a matter of considerable debate.

Eric John has argued that the common burdens, especially the requirement for military service, were first introduced upon bookland in the eighth-century with military service not required until the second half of King Offa's reign. [49] Citing a passage in Bede, John points out that in 655 King Oswiu of Northumbria, to commemorate his victory over Penda of Mercia, founded twelve monasteries. To these monasteries he "gave twelve



small estates, on which, as they were freed from any concern about earthly military service." [50] In Northumbria, by booking land, one freed it from military service. This helps to explain why Northumbrian nobles were willing to turn their homes into psuedo-monasteries in order to recieve bookland and why there was political instability in the kingdom. Since military obligations do not appear in charters until Offa's reign, they were probably not introduced until then. Their imposition made it possible for Mercian kings to maintain their military strength and thus ensure the kingdom's stability and rise to pre-eminence in the eighth-century.

Nicholas Brooks disagrees with John's thesis that military service was first imposed in Offa's reign. [51] He also disagrees with John's interpretation of Bede. Land which would now provide housing and/or food rents for monks therefore could no longer supply the same needs for the warrior nobility; but, this does not mean that the men on the land had no military obligations. Brooks shows that among the surviving royal diplomas from between 750 and 850, less than one fifth reserve any or all of the common burdens. It appears as if their inclusion in a charter was not considered to be important to either the donor or the recipient. This suggests that the burdens were already customary or willingly accepted before 750 and thus not affected by the drafting of individual charters.

Eventually, a clause imposing the common burdens became a usual feature of Anglo-Saxon charters. It is likely that Mercia was the centre for the formulation of this clause. The earliest trustworthy text with all three burdens is a grant of Uhtred of the Hwicce, made with the permission of King Offa, that dates from about 770. [52] For the most part the clause was confined to ecclesiastical charters. [53] This suggests that the clause's inclusion was simply a part of the formulas used by individual ecclesiastical centres.

Exactly how many men were required to serve in the royal fyrð has been a difficult question. At the time of Domesday Book, the ratio seems to have been that one man from every five hides, or six carucates in the Danelaw, would serve in the select fyrð. [54] An endorsement from King Coenwulf's reign to a charter of King Offa, contains a statement that five men were required to serve in the fyrð from an estate of thirty, or perhaps thirty six, hides. [55] But this is the only charter from the Anglo-Saxon period to specify the number of men required to serve in the army; therefore there is a chance that the number was an exception from the norm. [56]

One question which has not been examined in much detail yet is why grants of bookland were made. Bede stated that churchmen had to pay the king money for bookright and there are some charters which support his statement. [57] For the most part, however, the charters themselves state that the king made the grants "for the salvation of my soul" and/or "at the request of Bishop X." While one must certainly not discount the piety of the Mercian kings, it would be almost unimaginable for one to suppose that the only reason these grants were made was the king's desire for salvation.

In gifts of land to the lay nobility, the king must have expected something in return. That something was service. A gift of land was made once and for all, there was no repetition, and since a grant to the Church was made in perpetuity, it is likely that the service owed by the church was also open ended. This meant that the Church would always be in debt to the king.

Gifts of land were made between unequals. Land subordinated the recipient even though it benefited him as well. The subordination occurred precisely because of the value of the grant, land was more valuable than moveable wealth. Thus, it would be unlikely if the Church's paying money for bookright ended its obligations towards the king.

The subordination of the English church can be seen in that it was the king who made, or at least approved, all appointments to bishoprics and major monasteries. In the eighth-century the Mercian kings presided over Church councils and settled disputes over Church lands. In return, the king expected some type of service. Obviously, churchmen could not be expected to personally serve in the fyrd, but the fact that the common burdens were placed upon church lands indicates that they could contribute money, supplies, and other military essentials.

The church also provided a ready made bureaucracy for the king. It has already been shown that some monastic centres were located near to royal villas,[57] and it is quite likely that when the king was in residence the scriptorium would act as the royal writing office. Even when the king was not present, the local scriptoria could also act as record-keeping centres for royal estates and keep track of the amount of tribute that was due the king. Thus the charters illustrate the dependency of the Church upon the monarchy. The Church had to rely upon the king as its source of permanent earthly wealth, while in turn the king would receive from the church the necessary facilities for governing.

The final matter which must be considered, when discussing the charter evidence for Mercia, is the distribution of the surviving documents. The area covered by the surviving charters is very sparse. This is due to many factors. Some centres such as Hereford and Crowland were destroyed either by fire or by the Vikings at least once before 1100. Also, many records must have been lost during the Reformation with the dissolution of the monasteries. It is worth remembering that some religious houses may not have made any effort to preserve their early records, especially if the estates involved in them had passed into other hands.

It is because of the aforementioned factors that the best represented of the six Mercian bishoprics is Worcester. No authentic diplomas from the pre-Viking age survive intact for the sees of London, Lichfield, Leicester, and Lindsey. Hereford is represented by only one document. The surviving diplomas for the churches and monasteries within the diocese follow the same pattern as the episcopal sees. Northern Mercia is all but unrepresented with only a few authentic charters covering Lincolnshire and the eastern portion of the kingdom is little better. Only the West Midlands, especially Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, and the western portion of Warwickshire are fairly well represented. This area represents the diocese of Worcester and, because these monasteries and minsters came under the control of Worcester, their muniments were preserved. Thus the charter evidence for Mercia is extremely ill-balanced.

Due to the uneven distribution of the evidence, much of the discussion must be concentrated upon Worcester and its diocese. Therefore, the important question now is how typical or atypical was the royal patronage of the diocese when compared to the rest of the Mercian church? However, since the charter evidence for the rest of Mercia is so scanty, one must turn to other sources of evidence.

Unfortunately, even though Mercia politically dominated much of southern Britain for most of the eighth-century, the non-charter evidence for the kingdom is not extensive. The Venerable Bede concluded his great Ecclesiastical History in 731 after Aethelbald had been reigning for only fifteen years. Bede's interest in Mercia was only peripheral, he devoted far more space to the Northumbrian and Kentish churches. This may have been because he was not well informed about Mercian religious affairs or simply because the Mercian church did not attract his interest.

It is regrettable that after Bede's death the interest in historical writing in England all but faded away. Historical works were confined to hagiography, much of which is totally useless to the modern researcher, and brief chronicle entries. Neither of these types of literature appears to have been produced within Mercia's borders.

Only one Mercian saint, Guthlac of Crowland, had a fairly contemporary life written about him and by an East Anglian monk named Felix, which provides an important source for early eighth-century history, especially for the abbey of Crowland in Lincolnshire. But, since Guthlac died in 715, a year before his kinsman Aethelbald became king, it sheds little light on the latter's patronage of the church.

The chief chronicle source for this period is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This work was compiled in the late ninth-century and it is an important source for the Anglo-Saxon period, especially for the period from the late ninth- to eleventh-centuries. However, the entries for the eighth-century are often little more than brief annals and the work does not seem to have had a Mercian source.

One contemporary source which does shed some light on to the subject of the relationship between the Mercian kings and the Church is the surviving ecclesiastical letters. Coenwulf is the only king within this timeframe from whom a few examples of correspondence have survived. There are also letters from English churchmen which provided information on contemporary matters. The famous letter from Bede to his former pupil Egbert, Archbishop of York has already been mentioned above. There also survives a letter from the English missionary Boniface to King Aethelbald which provides some information on the king's treatment of churches and monasteries.[59] The Northumbrian Alcuin, residing at the court of Charlemagne, corresponded with several English churchmen and King Offa which now provide information on Offa's reign.

In the late eleventh- and twelfth-centuries there was a great renewal of historical writing in the Anglo-Norman world. Ecclesiastics, such as William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis, and Simeon of Durham produced important works.

Some of these writers drew upon earlier material which is now lost, to supplement pre-Conquest sources. Many monasteries, such as Bury St. Edmunds and St. Albans, also made efforts to record their own early histories. These works sometimes drew upon Anglo-Saxon records but often the compilers had to rely upon tradition to make up for the deficiencies of available material. Others, such as Evesham and Crowland went so far as to create forgeries to demonstrate the antiquity of their foundations. The fact that so many of the Anglo-Norman monasteries had to create forgeries to prove that their houses were ancient foundations would seem to indicate that even in the high Middle Ages the number of surviving eighth-century records was not extensive.

The shortage and brevity of these narrative sources shows that they can, at best, only supplement the charter evidence. Therefore, for the period of the Mercian supremacy the royal diplomas remain the best sources available for the patronage received by the Mercian church. These documents have been subjected to a great deal of scrutiny by modern historians. While the conclusions drawn from the charters sometimes differ, it is agreed that they do show the dependency of the Church upon the king and the importance of grants of land. The charter made it possible for the Church to hold estates in perpetuity in exchange for service to the monarchy.



[1] For example, S.89 an original charter of King Aethelbald (dated 736). Many charters of the Hwicce tend to have "personalized" subscriptions (Ego...consensi et subscripsi), but they are all the work of a single hand. See P. Wormald, Bede and the Conversion of England: The charter evidence, Jarrow Lecture, 1984, p.5.

[2] For example, S.7 (675) and S.8 (679).

[3] P. Chaplais, "Who Introduced the Charter into England? The Case for Augustine," in Prisca Munimenta, ed. F. Ranger (London, 1973), pp.88-107, and W. Levison, England and the Continent in the Eighth Century (Oxford, 1946), pp.174-232.

[4] S.1258 (798).

[5] Wormald (1984), p.4.

[6] S.95 (723x737).

[7] S.114 (779).

[8] P. Chaplais, "The Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diplomas of Exeter," Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research 39(1966), p.3.

[9] S.89 (736).

[10] ibid.

[11] S.242 (701).

[12] N. Brooks, "The Development of Military Obligations in Eighth- and Ninth-Century England," in England Before the Conquest, ed. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), pp.73-74.

[13] Bede, HE 1.25; 11.9; 111.4; 111.24.

[14] H.R. Loyn, The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England (London, 1984), pp.37-38.

[15] Ine 70.1.

[16] E. John, Land Tenure in Early England, 2nd. ed. (Leicester, 1964), p.30.

[17] S.132 (?795).

[18] T.M. Charles-Edwards, "Kinship, Status and the Origins of the Hide," Past and Present 56(1972), p.7.

[19] The earliest Mercian charter with the new type of formula is S.132, while a charter of King Beorhtwulf of Wessex, S.204 (844x845), still preserves the old construction.

[20] F.M. Stenton, The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period (Oxford, 1955), p.33.

[21] The payment of tithes remained voluntary until the reign of King Edgar (959-975), see II Edgar 1-3.1, and also Loyn (1984), p.59.

[22] P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, Medieval European Coinage: The Early Middle Ages (Cambridge, 1986), pp.270-295.

- [23] Bede, HE iv.13.
- [24] See for example S.97 (716x717), S.102 (716x717) and S.190 (836), and also D. Hooke, "The Droitwich Salt Industry: An examination of the West-Midland charter evidence," Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History 2(1981), pp.123-169.
- [25] E. John, Orbis Britanniae (Leicester, 1966), p.74.
- [26] ibid. pp.67-68.
- [27] Bede, Epist.
- [28] For example, S.114 (779), S.123 (785), and S.125 (786).
- [29] John (1964), p.32 n.4.
- [30] Bede, Epist.
- [31] S.70 (674x679) and John (1966), p.67 n.4.
- [32] Bede, Epist.
- [33] John (1966), p.22.
- [34] D.A. Bullough, "Anglo-Saxon Institutions and Early English Society," Annali della Fondazione italianna per la storia amministrativa 2(1965), p.651 n.16.
- [35] Wormald (1984), pp.20-21.
- [36] J.E.A. Jolliffe, "English Book Right," EHR 50(1935), pp.1-21.
- [37] Wormald (1984), p.21.
- [38] John (1964) and (1965)
- [39] Ibid. (1964), pp.11, 30.
- [40] Bede, VA 2.
- [41] For example, S.259 (749).
- [42] Wormald (1984), pp.21-22.
- [43] Ibid. pp.22-23.
- [44] S.92 (749). This charter survives in an imperfect form, the best printed text is CS.178. However, despite a poor text, the diploma is considered to be authentic.
- [45] S.117 (780).
- [46] S.128 (788).
- [47] S.146 (793x796), the best printed text is CS.273.
- [48] S.230 (?685). W.H. Stevenson, in his famous article, "Trinoda Necessitas," EHR 19(1914), pp.689-703, considered this diploma to be a later fabrication, but recently G.F. Dempsey, "Legal Terminology in Anglo-Saxon England: The trinoda necessitas charter," Speculum 57(1982), pp.843-849, has argued for its authenticity. His views do not seem to have



received wide acceptance.

[49] John (1964), pp.64-79.

[50] Bede, HE iii.24.

[51] Brooks (1971), pp.69-84.

[52] S.59. Another charter of King Aethelred to Worcester, S.77 (691x699), contains a clause reserving the common burdens, but Stevenson (1914), p.697 n.38, considers it to be an interpolation of the late eighth-century.

[53] Only one charter to a layman, S.139 (793x796) includes a clause reserving the common burdens.

[54] C.W. Hollister, "The Five Hide Unit and the Old English Military Obligation," Speculum 36(1961), pp.61-74.

[55] S.106 a grant from King Offa to Abbot Stithberht (767); with a endorsement by Pilheard, comes, with the permission of King Coenwulf (803).

[56] Brooks (1971), p.70n.2.

[57] Bede, Epist. and also for example S70 (674/679).

[58] A. Thacker, "Kings, Saints, and Monasteries in Pre-Viking Mercia," Midland History 10(1985), pp.1-2.

[59] Boniface, Epist.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Church of Worcester and its Daughter Houses

The early history of the Church of Worcester is obscure. Bede only mentioned it briefly when he noted the succession of its first three bishops,[1] but he said nothing about the reasons for its creation. The earliest detailed surviving account of Worcester's foundation is that of the twelfth-century historian commonly known as Florence of Worcester. He recorded that King Oshere of the Hwicce (fl.679x693) wanted to provide his principality with its own bishopric. This brought about the establishment of the see of Worcester in 679. The first bishop was a Whitby trained priest named Tatfrid.[2]

H.P.R. Finberg has speculated on whether Oshere may have been trying to detach his province from Mercia. He observed that the creation of a see of Worcester separated the Hwiccian church from the Mercian see of Lichfield. Osthryth, the sister of Oshere and wife of King Aethelred of Mercia, was murdered for reasons unknown in 697. Since Oshere himself disappears from the witness lists of diplomas after 693, it is not inconceivable that their deaths may have been connected. Aethelred is not recorded as making attempts to avenge his wife's death and Oshere is the last member of the Hwiccian dynasty to style himself as rex. [3] The charter evidence for the eighth-century demonstrates that the Hwiccian royal family continued to take prominent interest in Worcester's affairs and to endow it with land and privileges well into Offa's reign.

Most of the information concerning Worcester for the eighth- and ninth- centuries is derived from the surviving royal and episcopal charters. Worcester is unique among Mercian ecclesiastical institutions in that a substantial number of its diplomas have survived.

For much of this period, the church does not seem to have had a community of monks. Scholars in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries held the view that there were in fact two churches at Worcester. One was dedicated to St. Peter and the other to St. Mary, and it was at the latter minster that a group of monks had been established in the late seventh-century. This theory was based upon a series of charters, the earliest of which was dated between 737 and 740,[4] which purported to be grants made to St. Mary's, Worcester.

However, J.A. Robinson has shown this entire series of charters to be the work of later forgers.[5] The church of St. Mary was not established at Worcester until the late tenth-century, during the pontificate of Bishop Oswald (961-992), when it replaced the church dedicated to St. Peter.

The earliest reference to a community of monks living at the minster comes from a small group of charters from King Coenwulf's reign. The earliest of these is a grant from an Abbot Headda,[6] who was possibly the abbot of Dowdeswell in Gloucestershire. It stated that the grant was intended to secure the prayers of the Worcester familia for his kinsman Bishop Heathored. In the grant Headda stated that he was an alumnus of the familia of Worcester, which would have indicated that there was some type of monastic community there.

The make-up of this familia can be gleaned from the two other charters in this series.[7] In a grant from Bishop Deneberht to a priest named Balthun, the witness list contains the names of nine presbiteres, four diaconi, and two clerici, along with three other witnesses who are untitled.[8] The other grant was made to a certain Eanswith, by Bishop Deneberht, and was attested to by twelve members of the familia. [9] Thus, there was probably some sort of college of monk-priests at the cathedral by the time of Bishop Heathored (781-c.798).

One aspect of Worcester history that is not well documented is the relationship between the king and the bishop. This is especially true concerning the limits of royal and episcopal authority. The Anglo-Saxon church was subordinate to the monarchy, and there is plenty of evidence to show this, but there were limits to royal authority.

Since it was the king who usually made episcopal appointments it is unlikely that any political adversary would reach the bishop's throne. This does not mean, however, that the bishop of Worcester was a royal pawn.

The see's first two bishops, Bosel and Ofter, were probably Northumbrian since they were educated at Whitby, and in the case of the latter, at Canterbury under Archbishop Theodore.[10] The early careers of their successors are unknown, but the bishops were regular witnesses to diplomas issued by the Mercian kings, thus they must have had some political importance once they reached high ecclesiastical office.[11]

It is quite likely that the Mercian rulers must have given the bishops some independence in their own affairs and the charter evidence seems to confirm this. A good example of this autonomy involves the monastery at Withington in Gloucestershire. The monastery was founded by two nuns, Dunne and her daughter Bucege, under a grant from King Aethelred and Oshere of the Hwicce.[12] At her death, Dunne granted the estates and diplomas of the minster to her grand-daughter Hrothwaru, who would become abbess when she came of age. However, she was under age at her grandmother's death, and the estates were placed in the hands of her mother, who was a married woman. When Hrothwaru came of age, her mother claimed that the documents relating to the monastery had been destroyed and thus she kept the estates. The matter was brought before a church council headed by the archbishop of Canterbury along with three Mercian bishops and the bishop of Winchester.[13] King Aethelbald was not recorded as being present. The archbishop found in favour of Hrothwaru, who was permitted to keep the monastery and its lands for the rest of her life. After her death, though,

the estates were to go to the church of Worcester.

This charter shows that, in certain cases, the Church was allowed to settle its own disputes without royal interference. The settlement itself thereby secured the bishop of Worcester's control over the appointment of the abbess of Withington.

A charter from King Offa's reign states that Hrothwaru granted the estates to Bishop Milred before her death. Milred in turn granted the monastery to Abbess Aethelburh.[14] The grant to Aethelburh was made by Milred alone. While it is possible that a later copier may have drastically shortened the witness list, since only the bishop attests, the actual text of the grant makes no reference to the king.

There were other land grants made by the bishop of Worcester without royal sanction. One was a grant by Bishop Deneberht and the cathedral familia to Eanswith, bestowing an estate at Harvington in Worcestershire.[15] Another was a grant to the priest Balthun.[16]

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that these grants were different from royal grants. Both were grants made only for limited periods; Enswith's was only for her lifetime while Balthun's was for two lifetimes on one estate and three on the other. Most royal grants were made ius perpetuum. The estate would not return to royal hands after a certain period of time. This applied to both ecclesiastical and secular grants. Unlike the king, the bishop could not create bookright, since he already held the estates and privileges he granted. The episcopal grants were only for limited time periods as it seems that the bishop either wished to make sure that the estates would remain under Worcester's control, or he failed to have the power to alienate land permanently.

The above evidence indicates that the bishops of Worcester had some autonomy regarding their own affairs. This should not imply that they had more independence than they actually did. The Mercian church was very much dependent upon the monarchy both for financial support and for the legal protection of the lands and rights grant. There are some examples of churchmen appealing to the papacy in the pre-Viking age,[17] but such appeals were unusual. Rome was too far away and the political and religious influence it could exert was often limited. In Mercia, and the other English kingdoms, the king was the highest authority. He had the power and immediate means of enforcing both lay and ecclesiastical law.

In 789, late in King Offa's reign, and at the synod of Chelsea, there was a dispute between Bishop Heathored of Worcester and Wulfheard, a layman, over two estates at Inkberrow and Bradley in Worcestershire.[18] Wulfheard had seized the lands which had been given to the church by two men, Hemele and Duda. At the synod a compromise was reached, Wulfheard would be permitted to retain the lands for his lifetime and afterwards they would pass to the control of Worcester. Offa's name was the highest on the witness list, which indicates that he had senior authority.

In Coenwulf's reign this agreement was confirmed at the synod of Clofeshoh in 803.[19] The king's name was listed among the witnesses, though, in this instance, he was not given prominence over the ecclesiastics. The reasons for this may have been Offa's prominence in the earlier charter and the fact that since the Clofeshoh council was the one which abolished the metropolitan see of Lichfield, lay nobles may have played a less prominent part. Even though the king did not figure as prominently as his predecessor, the fact that he was included among the witnesses demonstrates that his presence was still considered necessary.

The kings also settled other disputes between Worcester and the lay nobility. In 794 at a synod at Clofeshoh, Offa heard a dispute between Bishop Heathored and Bynna, a comes of the king.[20] Bynna had usurped an estate at Aust in Gloucestershire which had been given to the church by King Aethelbald. Offa found in favour of the bishop and the estate was returned. Both this charter and the two mentioned above illustrate what must have been a common problem, that of secular nobles seizing church lands, and the only way the Church could regain these estates was through royal intervention.

The problem must have been greatest for the small family monasteries. It may have been difficult at times to find a member of the kindred willing to take holy orders in order to receive the estate.

An example of this is illustrated by an early tenth-century charter which gives the history of a long running dispute over a family monastery at Sodbury in Gloucestershire.[21] Bishop Milred (743-775) granted the estate to one Eanbald for the purpose of creating a family monastery on the site. The land was given on the condition that if no member of the family took priestly orders, the estate would return to the control of Worcester. Eanbald was succeeded by his kinsman Eastmund, who may have witnessed a charter in Beornwulf's reign.[22] After his death, however, the family seized control of it and kept it for secular purposes. Bishops Heaberht (822-845), Ealhhun (845-874), and Waerferth (874-915) all tried to get the land back, but without success. Eventually, in about 903, a settlement was reached through the intervention of ealdorman Aethelred and the Mercian council. It was agreed that Eadnoth, the man now holding the estate, would pay Bishop Waerferth 40 mancuses for the land, along with an annual rent of 15 shillings.



Such disputes cannot have been unique and some small monasteries must have made efforts to protect themselves. In his will, Aethelric left to his mother Ceolburh, who was probably the abbess of Berkeley, estates at Westbury-on-Trym and at Stoke Bishop in Gloucestershire.[23] The grant was made only for her lifetime since, after her death, the estates were to go to Worcester. In the diploma Aethelric stated that this arrangement was made in order that his mother might have protection against any claims of the people of Berkeley. The grant was made with King Coenwulf's approval.

This document demonstrates that some families believed that their monasteries would be better protected under the authority of the diocesan bishop. But even a bishop might need aid. After Ceolburh's death in 807,[24] the community of Berkeley retained the estate at Westbury-on-Trym. Worcester was only able to acquire it after the intervention of King Beornwulf.[25]

Even so, the king himself could not always be trusted. In the ninth-century, King Beorhtwulf seized estates from the Church of Worcester and gave them to his followers. Fortunately for the church, the king was persuaded to return the lands to episcopal control.[26] An even earlier case is revealed in St. Boniface's letter to King Aethelbald. He informed the king that he had received information that he (the king) was illegally seizing Church lands.[27] Aethelbald's reasons and Boniface's source are unknown. It is not improbable, however, that the king was confiscating the estates to reward his followers. Then again, it would have been equally plausible that Aethelbald was taking lands from one church in order to reward another.[28]

There were also territorial limits to the bishop's authority. In the eighth-century, the kings seem to have made sure that the bishop's authority was confined to the diocese of Worcester. The mediaeval county boundaries that made up the diocese of Worcester in Domesday Book were creations of the tenth- and eleventh-centuries. In the pre-Viking age, the

boundaries of the Mercian shires can only be guessed at, but it is probable that they followed the lines of ecclesiastical boundaries.[29] Therefore, since the boundaries of civil and ecclesiastical government were identical, it seems unlikely that the king would have allowed a bishop's power to extend beyond his territory any more than he would want an ealdorman's to have done the same.

There are only three charters, from the eighth-century, in favour of Worcester which involved areas outside of the diocese. More importantly, two of them are highly suspicious in their form.

The diploma with the most claims to authenticity was a grant from King Aethelbald to Bishop Milred and St. Peter's, Worcester.[30] The grant was one of the toll due on two ships in the port of London. The charter survives in the form of a ninth-century Old English translation of an earlier Latin diploma. Such grants were not uncommon. Four similar grants survive from Aethelbald's reign as does one from King Offa's.[31] Therefore, it is likely that this translation did record an authentic grant.

In this charter Aethelbald was granting movable wealth, the toll due from the ships. Such grants were inferior to those of land.[32] The bishop of Worcester was not gaining any estate or authority over an estate outside of his bishopric. All he was receiving was an extra source of monetary revenue.

The two suspicious grants involved the minster at Pyrton in Oxfordshire. This estate lay within the diocese of Leicester. The first charter purports to be a grant, made by King Offa to the Church of Worcester, of 40 hides (cassati) at Pyrton. The land was to be held free from all secular burdens, with the exception of the three common services.[33]

This charter was almost certainly a forgery of the late tenth-, or early eleventh-centuries. Offa was titled rex Anglorum, a common feature of tenth-century forgeries of Offan diplomas.[34] More importantly, the boundary clause was written in the venacular and it was far too detailed for an eighth-century diploma.

The second charter involving Pyrton is an even more clumsy forgery. It purports to be a grant of a 10 hide (manentia) estate at Pyrton.[35] Here once again, the language of this diploma is far too elaborate for an eighth-century document. Even more noticable is the forger's incorrect use of the place-name Pirigtun. A genuine charter of the late ninth-century refers to the location of the minster as Readanoran. [36] The earliest use of the name Pirigtun occurs in a diploma dated 987.[37] Thus this forgery must date sometime after the first half on the tenth-century.

It must be remembered that, although both diplomas are later forgeries, it does not mean that they do not reflect a genuine tradition. The late ninth-century charter mentioned above stated that the minster did belong to Worcester. It did not, however, state when and how the estate was acquired.[38] While conditions in the ninth-century, especially the late ninth-century, were certainly different from those a century earlier, it is not inconceivable that Worcester may have had some interest in Pyrton.

The only genuine example of a Mercian see holding estates, within the boundaries of another, is in the record of a settlement between Bishop Wulfheard of Hereford and Bishop Deneberht of Worcester.[39] Their dispute concerned two estates in Gloucestershire, one at Cheltenham and the other at Beckford, both of which were held by the see of Hereford.

Bishop Deneberht stated that Wulfheard had not paid to Worcester the food rent that was due from the estates. Wulfheard denied that any foodrent was due and stated that none had been paid in thirty years. But Deneberht produced evidence which showed that food rent had been paid from

Beckford to Bishop Waermund (775-777) and from Cheltenham to Bishop Heathored (781-c.798), and that Wulfheard himself had paid money in lieu of food rent in the past. Archbishop Aethelheard arranged a compromise in which the food rent from each estate would be paid in alternate years, one year from Beckford and the next year from Cheltenham.

It is unlikely that this charter is an isolated example of one bishopric holding an estate within another, even though such cases were probably fairly rare among the non-metropolitan sees. However, if the type of holding illustrated here was typical, then it demonstrates that the foreign bishop had to render something to the bishop in whose diocese the estate was situated. This was probably done to show the superiority of the bishop within his own diocese.

While grants to the bishop and church of Worcester, of estates outside of the old province of the Hwicce, appear to have been uncommon, the surviving royal diplomas concerning estates within the province are fairly numerous for the time. Worcester is the best represented archive of the Mercian church and thus it gives a better picture of royal patronage than that of any other church. Worcester was extensively patronized by both the Mercian and Hwiccian dynasties, though the later did so only with the authority of the former.

Since Worcester was the seat of a bishopric, it would be safe to assume that it received far more extensive grants than any other church or monastery within the diocese. The church seems to have acquired estates either from grants from the king and other members of the lay nobility, or from the small family monasteries whose minsters and lands were absorbed into its direct control.

The greatest source of Worcester's wealth was its land and the land only came into its hands with royal approval. The earliest grants were simply those of the estates themselves. Many grants state that the king

was granting the estate "with every necessary thing pertaining to it, with fields and forest, and fisheries and meadows." [40] Such formulas indicate that the king was not necessarily granting untilled land. Most of the estates granted by diploma must have been developed and economically productive.

While the king granted ownership, the Church still had to render the same public taxes which were also due from the lay nobility. Exactly what these encompassed in Mercia is unknown. A law of King Ine of Wessex (688-725) gives a fairly extensive list of the amount of food rent due from an area of ten hides. [41] There is no reason to doubt that similar renderings were not due to the Mercian king from estates within his territory. A charter from late in King Offa's reign reserves a portion of the food rent due the king from an estate at Westbury-on-Trym. [42] However, this diploma gives no clue as to whether there was any type of general assessment as there was in Wessex during Ine's reign.

It is therefore quite probable that the church of Worcester had to render a substantial portion of its income to the king before there were royal grants of immunities. The earliest genuine grant of immunities was made by King Aethelbald to all the churches and monasteries within Mercia in which he exempted them from all secular taxation. [43]

There are four Mercian charters with immunity clauses, all dated before 749. The earliest of these dates from the reign of King Aethelred, [44] while the others are from Aethelbald's reign. [45] All of these charters deal with estates within the province of the Hwicce, but none is free from suspicion. [46] Nicholas Brooks has pointed out that the bishop of Worcester was not among the witnesses of the general grant of immunities issued in 749. Therefore, it seems possible that such exemptions may have existed in this area at an earlier date. [47]

It may also be, however, that the general grant of 749 was not intended to cover all of Worcester's estates. From Coenwulf's reign, there is a brief series of diplomas granting exemptions from secular burdens on estates which were already in the possession of Worcester.[48] The fact that such grants had to be made more than fifty years after Aethelbald's grant adds weight to the fact that the grant of 749 did not cover Worcester because such grants may have already existed there. But the surviving charter evidence would indicate that even for Worcester, grants of immunities were very unusual before c.750. Such grants did not become commonplace until after that date.

The reasons for grants of immunities are unknown. Eric John has argued that Aethelbald made his general grant of immunities in 749 in order to curb the criticism he was receiving for his treatment of the Church.[49] A charter of King Offa to Worcester has the king removing tribute and food rent from two estates owned by the church, in exchange for the church's leasing the land to Offa's kinswoman Eanburga, abbess of Bath, for her lifetime.[50] King Coenwulf granted an exemption from the "provender-rent" of twelve men that was due from the town of Worcester and dependent minsters to Bishop Deneberht, in exchange for two estates.[51] These grants would indicate that, at times, Worcester had to purchase its immunities. But grants in which a price was paid for immunities are rare in the eighth-century, hence the practice may have been uncommon.

There are, however, Worcester diplomas which specifically state the rights of the beneficiary beyond the traditional phrase "freedom from all public taxes and burdens." These charters were not only grants of land but also grants of the fines due to the king as profits of justice.

The earliest of these is a grant from Uhtred of the Hwicce - with the permission of King Offa- to Aethelmund, a lay noble, for three lives.[52] In the charter, Uhtred states that no fine was to go outside the estate and that nothing but compensation was to be paid to the victims of theft.



Aethelmund and his heirs were not only receiving the land, and exemption from most public taxation, but also the profits of justice.

Another such grant is one from King Offa to the Church of Worcester.[53] The charter has been tampered with, since the grant was to St. Mary's, Worcester and Offa witnesses as rex Anglorum. But both Stenton and Finberg believe that there is an authentic basis behind it.[54] In the diploma, Offa granted the estate free from all secular burdens, including the fines for theft and the obligation to surrender thieves called wergeld-theovas, who if apprehended, were to be kept in the lordship of the church.

Three grants of the profits of justice also survive from Coenwulf's reign. The first two are very similar to those made during Offa's reign.[55] Both were grants to Worcester stating that no fine was to go outside the estates and that just compensation was due to the victims of crime.

On the other hand, the third charter is of more interest.[56] In this grant, the king stated that if a malefactor was apprehended three times he was to be handed over to a royal vill. This would seem to indicate that Coenwulf wished habitual criminals to come under royal justice. This was probably done as a limit of the bishop's authority over the local courts.

Since no similar grants have survived from any other Mercian church and references to the alienation by the king of profits of justice are comparatively rare in Worcester charters, it seems unlikely that such grants were common. Nor does it seem as if they came cheaply.

Aethelmund and his family secured their estate and privileges "in return for a suitable price," which one presumes to be money, but other forms of payment were available.[57] King Offa's grant to Worcester was made in exchange for another estate at a different location.[58]



In two of the three of Coenwulf's charters, which involved the profits of justice, land was given in exchange for the king granting the estates with these rights. In the first, Coenwulf granted an estate of 30 hides (tributarii) along with an exemption from the provider rent due from the town of Worcester. Since Worcester could not take control of the estate until after the king's death, in the meantime they had to give him two estates, totalling 13 hides, which would presumably not return to Worcester after his death.[59]

In the second diploma, Coenwulf granted an estate of 8 hides along with the profits of justice, in exchange for an estate of 12 hides.[60]

The only grant in which no form of compensation or payment was made to the king, in return for his granting the revenues of justice along with an estate, is a grant made by Coenwulf in 816.[61] This is also the only grant which placed a limit upon the bishop's legal authority, since habitual criminals would still be subject to royal justice.

Therefore, it seems evident, that in most cases, the king expected some form of compensation, either in money or land, for his granting away of what was probably an important source of revenue. The size of the compensations paid indicates the importance and value of the rights of justice. This is supported by the fact that, in grants in which the king is not stated to be granting this right, there is often no payment of any type.

From the above discussions and an examination of the number of estates known to have been granted to Worcester by Aethelbald, Offa, and Coenwulf,[62] it is obvious that the see benefited from Mercian patronage. The extent of the gain, however, in relationship to the other Mercian bishoprics, is impossible to say. The bishops of Worcester were regular witnesses to grants of the Mercian kings, but they were usually placed behind the bishops of Lichfield and Leicester.[63] Since Lichfield was seen

as the bishopric of the Mercians and was, for a brief time, raised to metropolitan status, it probably received more grants of land than any other Mercian church. The same may be true for Leicester since it was not separated from Lichfield until Aethelbald's reign and since it covered an area larger than Worcester.

Not all royal patronage came directly from the kings granting lands to the bishop. During the eighth-century some small independent family monasteries came under the direct control of the bishop of Worcester.

The two best examples of this involve the monasteries at Withington in Gloucestershire and Kidderminster in Worcestershire. The former monastery was founded with a grant from King Aethelred of Mercia and Oshere of the Hwicce and by two the nuns, Dunne and her daughter Buce.[64] It is quite probable that Dunne was a widow, since it was common practice for widowed noble women to enter the cloister. Buce, on the other hand, had probably never been married, for it was not uncommon for noble families to dedicate at least one daughter to the Church.[65]

Sometime during the episcopate of Bishop Ecwine (c.699-717), Dunne left the monastery and its estate to her grand-daughter Hrothwaru, who was to succeed her as abbess. At the time of Dunne's death, however, Hrothwaru was still a minor. Thus, the control over the estate passed to Hrothwaru's mother who was still married.

When Hrothwaru reach her majority and tried to assume control over the monastery, her mother refused to relinquish control claiming that Hrothwaru had no right since all documents relating to the monastery had been destroyed in a fire.

The issue was decided at a Church council in 736x737. The archbishop of Canterbury ruled that the monastery was to go to Hrothwaru. Upon her death, however, it was to pass into the control of the church of Worcester.

Sometime between 743 and 774, Hrothwaru died and the estate passed into the hands of Bishop Milred. In the later year, he granted it to Abbess Aethelburh for her lifetime. Thus, he ensured that the monastery, while having its own abbess, would remain under Worcester's control since she had to be appointed by the bishop.

The second example involves Kidderminster in Worcestershire. The monastery was founded with a grant from King Aethelbald to Cyneberht, comes, in 736.[66] Cyneberht seems to have wanted to build the monastery as a retirement home for himself. He witnessed charters of 742 and 748 as a layman,[67] but appears to have taken monastic vows by the end of Aethelbald's reign.[68]

After Cyneberht's death, which occurred sometime during the first half of King Offa's reign, the monastery passed to his son Ceolfrith. In turn, he granted the monastery and its estates to Worcester,[69] possibly because no member of the family was willing to assume monastic orders to retain control of it.

The original estate upon which Kidderminster was founded was later involved in the settlement of a dispute between King Offa and the church of Worcester.[70] The charter which records the settlement has received a great deal of attention because of its implications. Therefore, it is important to examine it in detail for the limitations it placed upon Worcester.

The dispute between Offa and the church centred around a number of estates, including the abbey of Bath and Kidderminster. The king claimed that Worcester was wrongfully holding these estates since they were a part of his inheritance from King Aethelbald. A compromise between the two parties was reached. Offa received the Bath lands, totalling 90 hides, plus an additional 30 hides located south of the river Avon. In return, Worcester was permitted to keep the other estates, totalling 111 hides,

plus the food rents which were owed to the king for the next three years.

Eric John has argued that the purpose of this synod was not to secure for the king lands which were a part of the royal patrimony. Rather, it was a part of a policy of denying the right of Mercian client-kings, in this case the Hwiccian rulers, to book land and thereby reducing them to the status of ealdormen. The king had no wish to deny Worcester any of its estates, it was able to keep them all, with the sole exception of Bath. Offa wanted to show that Worcester, which had once been the Hwiccian "royal see," would now be subject to Mercian authority. In effect, by coming to such an agreement with the Mercian king, the bishop was withdrawing his recognition of the Hwiccian dynasty.[71]

John's argument is interesting but not altogether convincing. By 781 the power of the Hwiccian dynasty must have declined considerably. The province was probably a creation of the Mercian king, Penda (?632-654),[72] and it is unlikely that any of its rulers, even those who styled themselves rex, ever had much independent authority. Also, there are no surviving charters from the eighth-century in which an Hwiccian ruler granted an estate or immunities without the approval of the Mercian king. Therefore, for members of the dynasty to grant an estate, they needed the authority of their Mercian overlord. Thus, the status of the members of the Hwiccian dynasty can have been little better than the Mercian ealdormen and Worcester, by accepting grants made only with Mercian approval, recognized the subordination of the native dynasty.

A second problem with John's argument concerns the estates and monasteries involved. The estate at Ismere in Worcestershire, upon which Kidderminster was founded, was originally granted by King Aethelbald but was later granted to Worcester with King Offa's approval. This happened at least six years before the dispute between Worcester and the king took place.

Another estate involved in this dispute, for which there is earlier documentary evidence, was the one located at Hampton Lucy in Warwickshire. At the end of 780, Offa granted to Worcester a remission from all royal tribute and the food rent in exchange for Worcester's leasing the estate to Offa's kinswoman, Eadburg, the abbess of Bath, for her lifetime.[73] It is most improbable that Offa would have approved either grant if they had been illegal, especially if such grants would damage his patrimony.

The question must now be asked, why was Offa challenging Worcester's rights to hold these lands? The most likely answer is that it was an attempt to prevent every minster and monastery in the diocese from coming under Worcester's direct control.

In his letter to Egbert, archbishop of York, Bede condemned what he saw as the widespread increase of family monasteries throughout Northumbria. Many of these "religious houses" followed no type of monastic rule. He urged the archbishop to bring these under his control and either make them true religious institutions or return the land back to secular use.[74]

In Mercia, regarding the cases of Withington and Kidderminster, this appears to have been what happened. Both of these institutions were small family monasteries which over the course of time came under Worcester's control. This was probably done to ensure that the standard of the religious life practised at these places was maintained. It is quite likely that most of the estates listed in the dispute of 781 had once been centres of family monasteries.

The one possible exception is Bath. This monastery, like Worcester, was founded by Osric of the Hwicce,[75] and, if its foundation charter can be trusted, it received a considerable initial endowment. In 781, its estate was almost three times larger than the next nearest estate involved in the dispute.

It would appear that Offa wished to place a limit upon the size and importance of the ecclesiastical centres which came under Worcester's control. Small family monasteries were one thing, but monasteries founded by kings (Osric styled himself rex) and under the control of the Mercian dynasty were quite another. Royal foundations, such as Bath, Gloucester, Bredon, and Winchcombe, did not come under the control of the bishops of Worcester in the eighth- or early ninth-centuries. Since they were royal foundations, they must have had extensive endowments and the king did not want their revenues going into the bishop's coffers.

The fact that Bath was returned to Offa, along with an additional estate of 30 hides, indicates that the dispute was over the king's attempt to place limits upon the bishop of Worcester's greed. This was to prevent the bishop from becoming too powerful a subject who might give the king troubles similar to those caused by the archbishop of Canterbury.

It is unlikely, however, that there was any attempt to stop the creation of family monasteries in Mercia during the eighth-century. There does seem to have been an attempt to make sure that new creations were made under the authority of the bishop, as in the case of the diocese of Worcester. This would help to ensure that the monastic rule was actually followed and that the estate did not simply become a retirement home for aging noblemen and their followers. Thus by having the bishop, with the approval of the king, grant the estate with the express purpose of founding a monastery, one would avoid the problem of psuedo-monasteries.

The classic example of this practice concerns the family monastery at Sodbury in Gloucestershire.[76] Bishop Milred granted the estate to a certain Eanbald, in order that he might found a monastery for his family. The estate was granted with the proviso that if there were no members of the family willing to take holy orders, the land would return to the control of Worcester. Eanbald was succeeded as abbot by his kinsman Eastmund, who may have been a member of the familia of Worcester.[77] After



Eastmund's death, however, the family illegally seized the estate and used it for secular purposes. Through the ninth-century the bishops of Worcester made attempts to reclaim the land but they were unsuccessful. In 903, at a council at Droitwich, a settlement was reached in which Eadnoth, the layman then holding the estate, agreed to purchase the land for the sum of 40 manuces and an annual rent of 15 solidi.

Another, more complex example, involves the monastery at Fladbury in Worcestershire. The monastery was founded at the end of the seventh-century, with a grant from King Aethelred to Bishop Ofor of Worcester.[78]

The Evesham Chronicle gives a slightly different story, stating that the grant was made to Ofor's successor Ecwine in 703. It also states that shortly after the grant was made Ecwine was forced to surrender the estate on the grounds that King Aethelred had had no right to give the land. The property had been owned by Aethelred's queen, Osthryth (d.697). Since Aethelred's son and successor Ceolred, who ruled from 709 to 716, was not her son, the land was not under the control of the Mercian royal family. Therefore, the estate went to Osthryth's nearest relative, Aethilheard of the Hwicce.[79]

H.P.R. Finberg has argued that there may be an historical basis behind this story.[80] However, it conflicts with the surviving charter evidence. Most notably, there is an endorsement to King Aethelred's original grant, in which Bishop Ecwine grants the estate to Aethilheard for one lifetime.[81]

It is difficult to reconcile these two disparate sources. It does seem likely, though, Fladbury had become a family monastery for the Hwiccian dynasty which was founded upon land controlled by Worcester.



A charter from the second half of King Offa's reign states that, after AEthilheard's death, the estate passed to another kinsman named AElfired.[82] After AElfired's death it passed into the hands of Ealdred of the Hwicce, who, in turn, granted it to his kinswoman, AEthelburh.[83]

AEthelburh was probably the same abbess who received the monastery at Withington in Gloucestershire from Bishop Milred.[84] AEthelburh had received both estates only for her lifetime, thus, after her death they would return to Worcester's control. In fact, the Fladbury estate, though held by members of the Hwiccian dynasty, was only under their control for grants of one lifetime each.[85] It never became an hereditary monastery in the sense that it was in the possession of the kindred. A member of the family could only assume control over it with the approval of the bishop of Worcester.

It is unknown exactly how widespread the practice was of founding family monasteries upon land already under ecclesiastical control. A head count of the surviving charters for Worcester indicates that more independent monasteries came under the see's control than there were family monasteries founded upon church land. Though, this may be due to the chances of survival. The church may not have made the effort to preserve records of family monasteries on its estates which had returned to the direct control of the church, because there had been no one in the family willing or able to take holy orders.

The church of Worcester's dealings with family monasteries illustrates the limits of the bishop's powers. Many small monasteries must have come under the see's control during the eighth-century, and there seems to have been royal approval of this trend. Nevertheless, the Mercian kings did put a limit upon the size of the ecclesiastical centres Worcester was allowed to absorb. The bishopric was dependent upon the monarchy for its wealth. If the church became too wealthy it might be able to exercise more independence.

The witness lists of both ecclesiastical and secular diplomas illustrate that the bishop of Worcester was in regular attendance at the Mercian court, therefore, he must have had a fair amount of influence. The king, however, still maintained the senior authority in the kingdom. All nobles, both lay and ecclesiastical, were dependent upon him as the source of their wealth and advancement. Thus, while the bishops of Worcester had some authority within their diocese, they were not allowed to become overmighty subjects by bringing every church and monastery within the diocese under their control.

[1] Bede, HE iv.23, he also mentions Bishop Wifrith's accession in 718 in another passage, v.23.

[2] According to Bede, HE iv.23, Tatfrid died before his consecration as bishop. In his place, another Whitby trained monk, Bosel, as consecrated.

[3] H.P.R. Finberg, The Early Charters of the West Midlands, 2nd. ed. (Leicester, 1972), pp.175-177.

[4] S.99, a grant from King Aethelbald to Osred, minister, a postscript states that the estate was later granted to St. Mary's, Worcester, presumably by Osred.

[5] A.J. Robinson, St. Oswald and the Church of Worcester, British Academy Supplement Papers 5(1919).

[6] S.1413 (781x800, most probably c.798).

[7] S.1262 (798x822) and S.1261 (?814).

[8] S.1262.

[9] S.1261 and also Robinson (1919), p.10.

[10] Bede, HE iv.23.

[11] N. Brooks, "Anglo-Saxon Charters: A Window on the Medieval World," unpublished lecture, 1986.

[12] The foundation charter is lost, but the early history of the house is given in S.1429 (736x737). Since Oshere witnessed diplomas between 674 and 693, the original grant must have been made between those dates.

[13] W. Dugdale, in a seventeenth-century manuscript extends the list with the bishops of Rochester, Lindsey, and Sherborne. Since the age of his source is unknown and since the list contains the names of two bishops of Sherborne (Forthhere and Herewold) it may not be reliable, see Whitelock, EHD, p.495n.11.

[14] S.1255 (744). It is not impossible that Aethelburh may have been a kinswoman of Hrothwaru. If such was the case, then the earlier settlement may have been a part of a general policy of bringing family monestaries under the control of the bishop of the diocese, see below.

[15] S.1261 (?814).

[16] S.1262 (798x822).

[17] The most famous example being that of Archbishop Wilfrid of York.

[18] S.1430.

[19] S.1260.

[20] S.137.

[21] S.1446 (c.903).

[22] S.1433 (824).

[23] S.1187 (804).

[24] ASC s.a. 807, records the death of an Abbess Ceolburh; William of Malmesbury, HR s.a. 807, records the death of an Abbess Ceolburh of Berkeley: both sources are probably referring to the same woman.

[25] S.143 (824).

[26] S.192 (840).

[27] Boniface, Epist.

[28] Edward the Confessor seized estates which rightfully belonged to Pershore and gave them to Westminster; see A. Williams, "Land and Power in the Eleventh-Century: The Estates of Harold Godwinson," Anglo-Norman Studies 3(1980), p.182.

[29] C.S. Taylor, "The Origin of the Mercian Shires," in Gloucestershire Studies, ed. H.P.R. Finberg (Leicester, 1957), pp.18-22.

[30] S.98 (743x745).

[31] From Aethelbald's reign: S.86 (773), S.87 (773), S.88 (734), and S.91 (748); from Offa's reign: S.143 (759x764).

[32] T.M. Charles-Edwards, "The Distinction between Land and Moveable Wealth in Anglo-Saxon England," in English Medieval Settlement, ed. P.H. Sawyer (London, 1979), pp.97-104.

[33] S.104 (774).

[34] F.M. Stenton, "The Supremacy of the Mercian Kings," in CP, pp.60-64, and also in Anglo-Saxon England, 3rd. ed. (Oxford, 1971), pp.210-212, argues that there are some authentic diplomas in which Offa was styled rex Anglorum; but P. Wormald, "Bede, the Bretwaldas and the Origins of the Gens Anglorum," in Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society, ed. P. Wormald (Oxford, 1983), pp.110-111, has shown the entire series to be later forgeries, though some may have an authentic basis.

[35] S.107 (766).

[36] S.217 (887).

[37] S.1354.

[38] S.217.

[39] S.1431 (803).

[40] S.89 (736). This charter survives in an original copy. The formula is quite common in Mercian charters, see for example: S.94 (716x737), S.96 (755x757), S.56 (759), and S.105 (764).

[41] Ine 70.1; "10 vats of honey, 300 loaves, 12 ambers of Welsh ale, 30 ambers of clear ale, 2 full grown cows or 10 wethers, 10 geese, 20 hens, 10 cheeses, a full amber of butter, 5 salmon, 20 pounds of fodder, and 100 eels."

[42] S.146 (793x796), see Chapter one, above.

[43] S.92 (749).

[44] S.75 (692).

[45] S.97 (716x717), S.84 (727), and S.99 (737x740).

[46] S.75 is probably a forgery; while S.99 has been subject to later interpolations; both S.97 and S.84 also contain suspicious features.

[47] N. Brooks, "The Development of Military Obligations in Eighth- and Ninth-Century England," in England Before the Conquest, eds. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (Cambridge, 1971), p.77n.1.

[48] S.179 (816), S.180 (816), and S.181 (817).

[49] E. John, Land Tenure in Early England, 2nd. ed. (Leicester, 1964), pp.70-73.

[50] S.120 (780), on the date of this charter see below, n.73.

[51] S.172 (813).

[52] S.59 (779), there are several variants of this text, but CS.203 is the text of the original charter.

[53] S.121 (780).

[54] Stenton, "Supremacy..." CP, p.58n.6, and Finberg (1973), p.41.

[55] S.171 (814) and S.185 (796x821, most probably 814).

[56] S.180 (816).

[57] S.59.

[58] S.121.

[59] S.172 and S.185 (both 7814). The second "charter" is usually printed separately, but it is actually a postscript to the first document; see Finberg (1972), p.99.

[60] S.171.

[61] S.180.

[62] See Appendix.

[63] Brooks (1986).

[64] The history of this monastery is related in S.1429 (736x737) and S.1255 (774).

[65] This practice was certainly true of the Mercian royal house, King Offa's daughter AEthelburg witnesses a charter as an abbess, S.127 (787).

[66] S.89 (736).

[67] S.90 (742) and S.91 (748).

[68] S.96 (755x575).

[69] S.1411 (757x775).

[70] S.1257 (781).

[71] John (1964), pp.88-89.

[72] Stenton (1971), p.45.

[73] S.120. This charter is dated 26 December, 781, which has led modern historians to assume that this grant was made after the dispute recorded in S.1257. The reason for this is that the first grant was made at Tamworth in Staffordshire, while the latter was drawn up at Brentford in Middlesex, and it is unlikely that Offa would be able, or willing to travel such a great distance in less than a week. But, that is assuming that the assumption of the New Year began on 1 January. However, K. Harrison, "The Beginning of the Year in England, c.500-900," ASE 2(1973), pp.51-70, has shown that by the last quarter of the eighth-century the New Year began on 25 December. Therefore, by our calendar S.120 should be dated 780. This makes it far more likely that S.120 was drawn up before S.1257.

[74] Bede, Epist.

[75] S.51 (676). Finberg (1972), pp.172-174, believes that this charter has an authentic basis.

[76] The history of this estate is given in S446 (903).

[77] An Eastmund, praesbiter, attested S1433 (824).

[78] S.76 (697x699).

[79] Chron. E. pp.71, 73.

[80] Finberg (1972), p.170.

[81] S.1252 (699x717).

[83] Ibid.

[84] S.1255 (774).

[85] S.62.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### The Remaining Churches in Mercia

It has already been stated that, on the whole, the charter evidence for the kingdom of Mercia is heavily weighted in favour of the church of Worcester. The material in this chapter will emphasize and examine this point. Since there are more surviving charters for Worcester than for the rest of the Mercian churches combined, the discussions in this chapter will, necessarily, be brief. For example the early cartularies for the sees of Hereford, Lichfield, Lindsey, Leicester, and London have either completely vanished or survive only in a few fragmentary remains. For other important minsters and monasteries within the kingdom, such as Bredon, Medeshamstede (Peterborough), Evesham, and Winchcombe, the charter evidence is little better.

It is because of the scarcity of the evidence that the kingdom will be dealt with on a diocese by diocese basis; the minsters and abbeys within each diocese will also be treated on an individual basis. It should be remembered that this will not be a list of all the ecclesiastical centres known or thought to have been active between 716 and 821 and only those minsters and monasteries which can be shown to have received some form of royal patronage are included.

#### I. THE DIOCESE OF WORCESTER

This portion of the discussion will consist only those churches and abbeys that did not come under Worcester's control before the death of King Coenwulf.

Acton-Beauchamp



The only charter that has survived for this monastery is its foundation grant. In the first half of his reign, King Aethelbald granted an estate of 3 hides (manentes) at Acton Beauchamp in Worcestershire (the site is now in Herefordshire), to Bucca, comes.<sup>[1]</sup> The grant was made for the foundation of a monastery and Bucca paid an unspecified amount of money to the king for the grant. The size of this estate is small and the fact that the estate had to be purchased would indicate that Bucca was probably not an important personage at the Mercia court. Bucca, himself, does not appear as a witness on any other Aethelbaldian charters which helps to enforce the view that he was a minor courtier. It is also quite likely that this monastery was intended for his retirement just as Kidderminster was for Cyneberht.

#### Bath

Despite an attempt by Worcester to annex this monastery in King Offa's reign, the abbey managed to maintain its independence throughout the eighth-century.

A charter that purports to be the foundation grant of 100 hides (manentes), made by King Osric to Abbess Bertana has survived.<sup>[2]</sup> The diploma seems to have been amplified in the late eighth- or early ninth-centuries, but there appears to be a genuine grant of some type underlying it.<sup>[3]</sup> The charter states that the grant was made for the foundation of a nunnery. Since there are no trustworthy accounts of independent nunneries in the pre-Viking age, it is far more likely that Bath was a double monastery under the rule of an abbess. This is confirmed by two charters from King Offa's reign which indicate that the king's kinswoman, Eanburg, was the monastery's abbess in 780.<sup>[4]</sup>

Bath was located almost directly on the border between Wessex and Mercia and it is not surprising that the monastery received a small grant from King Cynewulf of Wessex in either 757 or 758.<sup>[5]</sup> This may have been

part of an attempt by the West Saxon king to acquire support for annexing Mercian territory during the civil war that followed King Aethelbald's murder. Nevertheless, despite Cynewulf's overtures, the monastery seems to have supported Mercian rule.

Bath was certainly in the centre of the dispute between King Offa and the church of Worcester that was settled in 781.[6] In the winter of 780, Worcester had leased an estate of 17 hides at Hampton Lucy in Warwickshire to Abbess Eanburg for her lifetime.[7] The next year, Eanburg appears to have died because the estate granted her was recorded as being in Worcester's hands, as was the Abbey of Bath itself.[8] At the synod of Brentford (Middlesex), Offa forced Worcester to give up Bath along with an estate of 30 hides (cassati).

What may have happened is that after Eanburg's death, probably early in 781, the church of Worcester would have been able to seize control of the entire abbey, since it would have been without a head, and the estate granted to Eanburg. Since both the see and the abbey were founded by Osric it is understandable why Worcester may have felt that it should have a say in Bath's affairs.

It was only through the intervention of the king that Bath was able to keep its independence. This would indicate that while the monastery was an Hwiccian foundation, it had since come to be patronised by the Mercian kings.

#### Berkeley

The abbey of Berkeley seems originally to have been a family monastery. Its origins are unknown, but the diplomatic evidence of the late eighth- and early ninth-centuries indicates that it was a double monastery under the rule of an abbess.

The earliest reference to Berkeley is in the testament of Aethelric, son of Aethelmund, which was made in 804. In the will he bequeathed the estates at Westbury-on-Trym and at Stoke Bishop to his mother Ceolburh, the abbess of Berkeley, and, after her death, the former estate was to go to the church of Worcester.[9]

The estate at Westbury was acquired by Aethelric's father with a grant from King Offa which was made sometime at the end of the latter's reign.[10] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the death of an ealdorman Aethelmund in 802. Thus, it was probably at that time that the estate came into his son's hands.

When Aethelric died is unknown, but he appears to have pre-deceased his mother who died in 807.[11] At her death the estate at Westbury should have passed to Worcester, but the community at Berkeley was reluctant to give it up. This may have been because Ceolburh's successor was her kinswoman and was therefore reluctant to surrender what may have been considered a family estate.

It was not until 824 that a settlement was reached, with King Beornwulf's approval, and the estate passed into Worcester's hands.[12]

The land at Stoke Bishop, on the other hand, remained in the possession of Berkeley until the end of the ninth-century. In 883, the abbey sold the estate to ealdorman Aethelred for 30 manuces of gold and a grant of privileges.[13]

Aethelric's original bequest had been made with King Coenwulf's approval and the fact that it took Worcester almost twenty years to recover the estate at Westbury would seem to indicate that Berkeley's continued possession had at least tacit royal support.

## Bishop's Cleeve

The origins and foundation of this minster are unknown. It only appears in one pre-Viking diploma. In this document, King Offa granted an estate of 15 hides (mansiones) at Timbinctun, north of the Tyrl brook, to Ealdred of the Hwicce.[14] The charter states that the church was dedicated to St. Michael; thus, it is unlikely that the church was founded by either the Hwiccian or Mercian dynasties, since minsters with such origins were usually dedicated to St. Peter.

## Bredon

This monastery was under the control of King Offa's family. A diploma dated 780 states that it was founded by Offa's grandfather, Eanulf.[15] There is a record of a lost charter of King Aethelbald granting an unspecified amount of land for the foundation of a monastery at Bredon to Eanulf.[16] The record states that the grant was made during the pontificate of Bishop Egwine, who died on 30 December, 717. This would place the grant sometime within the first two years of Aethelbald's reign. However, the record also has the king granting the estate free from all secular burdens, save those of bridge work and fortress repair. Such clauses do not occur in any authentic diplomas before c.750. Therefore, the charter which was recorded may have been a forgery or at least tampered with at a later date.

However, three genuine grants from Bredon have survived from King Offa's reign. The earliest of these is a grant from Offa to Ridda, his minister, which dates from about 775.[17] The king granted to Ridda an estate of 8 hides (manentes) at Evenlode in Gloucestershire. The estate was to be held for a period of three lives, those of Ridda, his wife Bucga, and his daughter Heburg; and, it was to be held by "ecclesiastical right." After their days, the land was to go to Bredon with the same liberties enjoyed by the family.

This may indicate that the estate was to serve as some type of family monastery, perhaps formed by land which was already part of Bredon's possessions. Since the estate would eventually come under Bredon's control, such a grant allowed the king to reward a faithful minister and also to benefit Offa's own family monastery since the estate may not have had immunities before it was granted to Ridda.

Another grant with more interesting implications is one in which Offa granted three estates to Bredon in 780.[18] This charter states that the bishop of Worcester had the use of the forests, fields, pastures, and streams on the estates. Such a statement might indicate that Worcester had some sort of control over the monastery. Since the foundation charter is lost, it is impossible to know if Bredon was founded upon a Worcester estate.

Other diplomatic evidence, however, makes Bredon's subjugation to Worcester unlikely. In a grant made that same year to Bredon, it is recorded that the abbey would always remain in the hands of Offa's family.[19] This would seem to show that the monastery was founded independently of Worcester. If the monastery had been founded on a Worcester estate, the charter would have included some type of statement about the monastery returning to Worcester's hands should no member of the king's family take holy orders.

#### Evesham

All the the eighth-century charters for Evesham are at best dubious. Most are clumsy forgeries drawn up by post-Conquest scribes in attempts to produce records for the abbey's early history.

According to both charter tradition and the Evesham Chronicle the abbey's first abbot was a monk named Ecwine. However, the sources conflict regarding the date of the monastery's foundation. The earliest dated charter benefiting Evesham was a supposed grant from Aethelweard of

the Hwicce to Bishop Egwine of Worcester, made for the Church of St. Mary, Evesham, and dated 706.[20]

This grant was followed by a series of charters purporting to be from Kings Cenred[21] and Ceolred[22]. There also exists a statement said to have been made by Egwine, bishop of Worcester, founding and endowing the monastery in 714.[23] Finally, there is another diploma in which King Aethelbald founds the monastery in either 716 or 717.[24] All of these documents are poor post-Conquest forgeries dating from the twelfth-century, and the account in the Evesham Chronicle of the abbey's foundation is all but worthless since it is based upon these sources.

The diplomas for the rest of the eighth- and early ninth-centuries are little better. Only King Aethelbald's grant of part of a salt-house (mansio) at Droitwich in Worcestershire has any real claim to authenticity.[25] Such grants were common in the eighth-century on account of the salt-industry in the Droitwich area.[26]

There is no hint in Aethelbald's diploma that Evesham was a daughter house of Worcester. From the post-Conquest forgeries it seems as if there were some type of tradition regarding this by the twelfth-century. But, this tradition probably arose from the confusion of the name of the abbey's founder, Egwine, with that of the Bishop of Worcester. Also, Evesham is recorded as being dedicated to St. Mary,[27] yet Worcester, and many of its dependences, were dedicated to St. Peter. Thus, it is likely that Evesham was founded independently of Worcester, though how long it was able to maintain its independence is unknown.

#### Gloucester

Like Worcester, Gloucester abbey was originally a foundation of the Hwiccian dynasty. Osric of the Hwicce is said to have established the monastery sometime in the second half of the seventh-century, probably with the approval and support of King Aethelred.



Originally, it seems to have been a double monastery, since its first head was Cyneburh, who was said to have been Osric's sister. She was succeeded by her kinswoman, Eadburht. The abbey's last known abbess was Eafe who, according to tradition, died in 767.

The monastery seems to have been founded as a place for royal and noble widows and, also, for the education of their children. After Eafe's death, however, it appears to have been a college for secular priests.[28]

No diplomas, genuine or otherwise, benefiting Gloucester have survived. There are, however, records of lost charters which, if they can be trusted, show that the church did receive grants from the Mercian kings.

According to these summaries, King AEthelbald granted a portion of a building along with two salt furnaces at Droitwich in Worcestershire, which would be free from all taxes.[29] If this were an actual grant it should probably be dated after c.750 when grants of immunities became common. AEthelbald is also recorded as granting estates at Arle,[30] Oddington, and Badgworth in Gloucestershire.[31]

In Offa's reign, Ealdred of the Hwicce, no doubt with his overlord's approval, is recorded as granting estates at Abbot's Barton,[32] Coln St. Aldwyn, Weapcawrtane, Chedworth, and Nympsfield in Gloucestershire.[33] Ealdorman AEthelmund is recorded as granting large estates at Over and Lecche (either Northleach or Eastleach) in Gloucestershire.[34]

Surprisingly, King Offa is said to have only granted one estate[35] and no record survives of any grant made by Coenwulf. It may be that this abbey was too closely associated with the Hwiccian royal house, especially since it seems to have been a family monastery until at least 767. Therefore, it may not have attracted the interest of the Mercian kings.



## Kempsey

The origins of this abbey are unknown, but it may have been a family monastery. It only appears in one eighth-century diploma which is a record of an exchange between King Coenwulf and the abbot, Balthun.[36] In the grant, the king exchanges an estate of 30 hides (manentes) at Kempsey in Worcestershire for an estate of 12 hides (manentes). The diploma also states that Balthun has the right to choose his own heir, a clause which points to the hereditary nature of this establishment.

## Persnore

There are no surviving pre-Viking age charters or references to this abbey. However, a charter of King Edgar, dated 972, refers to a now lost diploma of King Coenwulf in which the king granted immunities to the monastery at the request of ealdorman Beornoth.[37] Beornoth appears as a regular witness to many of Coenwulf's charters,[38] thus there may have been such a grant.

## Winchcombe

This abbey was almost certainly a family monastery for the kin of King Coenwulf. A charter dated 825, which recorded the settlement of a dispute between Coenwulf's daughter, Coenthryth, an abbess, and the archbishop of Canterbury, contains a passage which suggests that Winchcombe served as the repository for the king's family records.[39] It is certainly true that both Coenwulf (d.821) and his son Cynehelm (d. c.812) were buried there.

According to the abbey's own tradition it was founded by King Offa in 787 as a monastery for nuns. It was not until 798 that a community of monks was established there by King Coenwulf.[40] Since it was against English practice to have independent communities of nuns, it is far more likely that if Offa actually founded the abbey it was as a double monastery. Since it was a family monastery, it may be possible that in 798

no female members of Coenwulf's family were willing or able to become abbess; thus, a male member of the family took control.

Unfortunately, this tradition conflicts with two documents which claim to be dated from Coenwulf's reign. The first is a grant of privileges from Pope Leo III to Coenwulf,[41] and the second is a charter dated 811 which purports to be the foundation charter for Winchcombe.[42]

The former document is stated to be a grant made by the pope to all the churches founded by the king, but a brief prologue states that it is specifically meant to apply to Winchcombe.[43] In the grant, Leo bestows protection and immunity to the monastery, which will eventually be the king's burial place, and he also grants the right for both the king and his heirs to dispose of his other monasteries at will.

Exactly how trustworthy this document is, may be debated,[44] and why Coenwulf would apply to the papacy for such a grant is unknown. It may have been that since his son Cynehelm appears to have died at about this time and thus left the king without any direct male heirs, Coenwulf may have wished to ensure his family's monasteries passed into the appropriate hands. His eventual successors would have difficulty in overturning a papal grant.

The supposed foundation charter for Winchcombe[45] presents different problems. In its present form, it is a clumsy forgery. It mentions "precepts" of Pope Paschalis (817-824) and also notes the presence of Coenwulf's brother, King Cuthred of Kent (d.807).

Nevertheless, Wilhem Levison has argued that there may be some type of charter, most likely a record of a synod, behind it. He notes that the witness list with its long list of bishops and duces is similar to that of genuine synodal diplomas. He also points out that the grant is dated 11 November, 811, which was a Sunday and that both the synod of Chelsea (816) and Clofeshoh (824) are recorded as meeting on a Sunday. Also concerning

the dating clause, he demonstrates that the formula used is very similar to the one found in a charter drawn up at the synod of London which took place in 811 and which survives in a contemporary copy.[46] It may be that this synod had business involving Winchcombe, but it is unlikely that it involved the foundation of the monastery since no estates are granted in the diploma.

The only genuine diploma involving Winchcombe abbey is a grant from Coenwulf to Wulfled, a laymen.[47] In the charter the king granted an estate at Aldington in Worcestershire along with some immunities; but, the king did transfer a portion of the food rent owed to him from this estate to Winchcombe. This charter survives in a contemporary copy, but it is damaged so portions of the grant are missing. However, it does show that Coenwulf did transfer some of the tribute normally due to him to the monastery which had important connections with his family.

#### Wootton Wawen

This abbey was another family monastery under the control of members of the Hwiccian royal family. All that has survived from its archive is its foundation charter.[48] It was founded by Aethelric, the son of Oshere of the Hwicce, with a grant of an estate of 20 hides (cassati) at Wootton Wawen in Warwickshire by King Aethelbald. The grant mentions saltworks on the estate, and as mentioned above, since salt production seems to have been a major industry in the Hwiccian province, such an estate would provide the monastery with an important source of income.[49]

#### II THE DIOCESE OF HEREFORD

This diocese was created by Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury as a part of his reform of the English episcopate.[50] The diocesan boundaries probably followed the political boundaries of the province of the Magonsaete.[51] Unfortunately, no charters for any estates within the diocese have survived from the eighth-century.

There are, however, two diplomas which mention grants within the diocese of Worcester which were made to Hereford. The first is an Old English boundary clause which appended a Latin charter of King Aethelbald dated 743.[52] The Latin portion of the diploma consists of a grant of two estates at Aston Blank and Notgrove in Worcestershire to Osred of the Hwicce. The boundary clause is preceded by the statement: "These are the bounds of the land at Aston which Aethelbald, king of the Mercians, booked to Utel, bishop of St. Mary's [Hereford]."

Nevertheless, the authenticity of this clause is at best dubious. Aethelbald was assassinated in 757 and Utel was bishop of Hereford from 793 to 801 which would make such a grant impossible. However, H.P.R. Finberg has argued that the anachronism of the dates may have been the result of a later scribe conflating two genuine grants.[53]

This appears to have been unlikely. Detailed vernacular boundary clauses are not a feature of genuine eighth-century diplomas. More importantly, the Latin text refers to St. Mary's, Worcester. Both these facts would point to this diploma being a forgery of the late tenth- or eleventh-centuries, if not later. Thus, there is little evidence to support Finberg's suggestion.

The other diploma, which deals with the church of Hereford, is the record of a dispute between the bishops of Hereford and Worcester.[54] This charter shows that Hereford did own at least two estates within the diocese of Worcester, but it also demonstrates that Hereford owed food rent to the Bishop of Worcester for these properties.

Neither charter gives any idea as to how wealthy or impoverished the church of Hereford was in the eighth-century. The diocese was located right on the border between the Welsh and the Mercians and therefore, it may have suffered from the Welsh incursions that resulted from the Welsh campaigns of King Offa.[55] The bishops of Hereford were fairly regular

witnesses to charters issued in the names of the Mercian kings, but, generally they come toward the end of the bishops in the witness list. This might indicate that they were not as important as the other bishops, and since the size of the diocese was smaller than any other Mercian diocese, this might indicate that their see was the poorest. Indeed if such were the case, it may be a reason for Hereford owning estates within the diocese of Worcester.

### III THE DIOCESE OF LICHFIELD

This diocese was the oldest of the Mercian sees and its bishop was generally referred to as the "bishop of the Mercians." [56] Unfortunately, no charters involving estates of the church of Lichfield have survived, so other sources must be used. These sources suggest that the see did receive a great deal of patronage, but they are unable to qualify or quantify the extent in the same way that charters make it possible.

#### Lichfield.

Most of the information concerning the see, in the eighth-century, centres around its temporary elevation to metropolitan status during the reign of King Offa. However, most of the evidence for Lichfield's elevation comes from Coenwulf's reign when the king was negotiating with the papacy over the see's demotion back to episcopal status. [57]

King Offa seems to have had political difficulties with the archbishop of Canterbury, Ianberht. This may have been because Ianberht had been appointed to his post by the Kentish king, Egbert II, who had been able to throw off Mercian domination for a time. Thus, Ianberht probably resisted Offa's attempts to turn Kent into a Mercian shire.

In the 780s, probably sometime between 783 and 785, Offa opened negotiations with the papacy over the Mercian see of Lichfield being raised to metropolitan status. Apparently he had the support of the Mercian

episcopate and may also have had some southern support since Eadberht, bishop of London, appears as moneyer for the king.[58] This diocese remained under Canterbury's control after Lichfield's elevation, thus its support may have been crucial.

In 787 Pope Hadrian I sent two legates, George and Theophylact, to Britain to examine the situation. At a council of Clofeshoh, which was attended by both Offa and Cynewulf of Wessex, the Mercian king's plan was approved and Lichfield was made a metropolitan see.[59]

In later, post-Conquest sources, the new archbishopric is said to have had control over the sees of Worcester, Leicester, Lindsey, Elmham, and Dummoc, while Canterbury retained those of London, Rochester, Winchester, and Selsey.[60]

It is almost certain that Lichfield must have received substantial endowments to go with its new elevated status. Since it was an archbishopric, it may have followed Canterbury's example and held estates outside of its own diocese.[61] Hygeberht, the new archbishop, witnesses Offan diplomas after Archbishop Ianberht, though, after the latter's death he became the most prominent episcopal witness due to his seniority.

However, the establishment of a new archbishopric violated the peace of the normally conservative English church. Shortly after Offa's death, Coenwulf began negotiations with the papacy to have Lichfield reduced back to episcopal status. The king seems to have had the idea of abolishing the metropolitan see of Lichfield, but to make up for the loss by moving the southern metropolitan see from Canterbury to London. Since Pope Gregory I had originally intended London to be the southern archbishopric[62], this would permit the king to continue to have an archbishopric within Mercia itself.



Pope Leo III agreed with the idea of the reduction of Lichfield, but he refused to consider transferring Canterbury's status to London. Therefore, at a council of Clofeshoh, held in October 803, Lichfield's metropolitan status was abolished.[63] It is impossible to tell if this reduction meant the loss of any estates or privileges. The bishops of Lichfield continued to be the most prominent witnesses among the Mercian episcopate in diplomas, so it is unlikely that their political influence was reduced much in Mercia.

#### Much Wenlock

This double monastery was founded by Mildburg, the daughter of Merewalh a prince of the Magonsaete. It was originally a daughter house of St. Botulf's at Icenhi (probably Iken in Suffolk).[64]

In the post-Conquest Life of Mildburg, written by the monk named Goscelin, there is a document which H.P.R. Finberg refers to as "St. Mildburg's Testament." [65] It consists of a list of grants made to the monastery while its foundress was still alive.

The last of these records a transaction in which Sigward, comes regis, sold an estate of 3 hides (manences) at Magdalee to Mildburg. This sale was made with the approval of King AEthelbald, and was attested by Bishop Wealhstod of Hereford, Bishop Wilfrith of Worcester, Abbot Ova, and Cynric, dux, all of whom are regular witnesses to AEthelbald's diplomas.[66]

Therefore, since the witness list agrees with other AEthelbaldian charters, Finberg may well be correct when he suggests that this is an authentic record of a grant. This monastery seems to have survived the Viking raids, which probably destroyed most of its muniments, but there survives an early tenth-century grant from ealdorman AEthelred and his wife AEthelfaed to this abbey.[67] Thus, some charters may have survived for Goscelin to incorporate into his biography.



## Repton

No charters survive for this double monastery. Nevertheless, both written and archaeological evidence has shown that the abbey served as the burial place for Merewalh of the Magonsaete, who was said to have been a son of King Penda, the Mercian kings Aethelbald and Wiglaf, and the latter's grandson, Wystan.[68] It was also at this monastery where St. Guthlac, a member of the Mercian royal house, was educated and took his monastic vows.[69] Since it served both as a place of education and as the burial place for members of the Mercian royal house, it is quite likely that the monastery received substantial grants of either land and/or immunities.

## IV THE DIOCESE OF LEICESTER

None of the ancient muniments for the church of Leicester have survived. The see itself did not become firmly established until the reign of Aethelbald. The size of the diocese was substantial and the bishops were often prominent witnesses to royal diplomas. This would indicate that the episcopate was well endowed but no evidence has survived to show the extent of royal generosity.

### Breedon-on-the-Hill

This monastery seems to have been founded in the late seventh-century, possibly as a daughter house of Medeshamstede. [70] Both Ann Dornier and Andrew Rumble believe that a grant from Fridwic, princeps to Abbot Haedda made sometime in the last quarter of the seventh-century may be the abbey's foundation charter.[71]

Bede records that in 731, a priest of the abbey named Tatwine became Archbishop of Canterbury.[72] How much influence King Aethelbald had of this appointment is unknown. However, it must certainly have been in the king's interest to patronize the home abbey of the archbishop.

## Oxford

A monastery is said to have been founded here at the beginning of the eighth-century by St. Frideswide. When the monastery was founded, Oxford was a part of the diocese of Lichfield, however, it came under Leicester's control once the latter see secured its independence in c.737. The later tradition concerning Frideswide recorded that she was a member of the Mercian royal family and that her death occurred sometime around 735.[73] If such was the case, then it is not unlikely that her foundation may have received some type of grants, at least from Aethelbald while she was still alive.

## St.Albans.

According to thirteenth-century tradition, best exemplified by Matthew Paris, this monastery was founded by King Offa in 792. Unfortunately, the series of charters which purport to be grants from Offa and Egfrith are of a very dubious nature.

The charter which claims to be the foundation grant is a gift from King Offa and his son, Egfrith, of estates at Winslow, Scelfdune sive Baldingicotun (probably Salden in Marsley), and Warren Farm in Herwood, all of the estates being in Buckinghamshire. Also, Abbot Alhmund gave the king an estate at Lygetune (probably Luton in Bedfordshire) in exchange for an grant of exemption from supplying men for the fyrð. [74]

In its current form, this document cannot be an eighth-century diploma. Margaret Gelling has argued that the description of the boundaries suggests a pre tenth-century date and that Alhmund's statement about fyrð service would not be the type of immunity to be invented by a later forger.[75] Thus there is a possibility that the forger was using authentic material.

The other charter of King Offa benefitting the abbey is another joint grant made with his son.[76] The form in which it survives is also very suspicious. It purports to be a grant of estates at Cashio in Hertfordshire, and Hamstead's House, St.Stephen's and Stamore in Middlesex. The estates were to be free of all secular burdens save fyrd service and public proclamations.

The first portion of the surviving text, the invocation, proem, and dispositio clause do resemble those found in eighth-century charters. The rest of the document is a very poor forgery; especially the witness list, which includes attestations by all the Mercian kings as well as Alfred the Great. The opening portion of the diploma would suggest that the forger was working from an authentic text, but it is impossible to say how much he altered the original.

There also exist two diplomas of King Ecgfrith which claim to be grants of estates at Turville in Buckinghamshire and at Pinesfield Farm, Rickmansmouth in Hertfordshire.[77] Both are clumsy forgeries with no claims to authenticity.

There are, however, three diplomas from the reign of King Aethelred the Unready which mention lost grants from King Offa to St.Albans. The earliest of these is dated 996 and concerns estates at Burston Farm, Wincelfelde, Hagan, and Westwick Hall in Hertfordshire.[78] The charter includes a statement that these estates were originally granted to the abbey by Offa.

The second grant of Aethelred is similar to the earlier one. It was made in 1005 and involved estates at Flamstead and at St. Albans itself in Hertfordshire.[79]

Unfortunately, both of these documents contain suspicious features, but they do seem to be substantially authentic.

The third charter of Aethelred is, however, different. It involves three Hertfordshire estates at Norton, Rodanhengran, and Oxney.[80] It states that these lands were originally granted by King Offa to St.Albans, but that they were confiscated sometime after his death. The diploma survives in a contemporary copy and therefore, is of unquestionable authenticity. It thus provides plausible evidence that St.Albans did receive some royal grants in the eighth-century.

#### V THE DIOCESE OF LINDSEY

During the early part of the seventh-century, Lindsey was an independent, or at least semi-independent kingdom and the boundaries of the bishopric followed the area's political frontiers. Before Aethelbald's reign, it had been absorbed into Mercia, but its native dynasty managed to last until the middle of King Offa's reign.[81] The bishops of Lindsey, however, were regular witnesses to charters issued under Mercian royal authority.

The exact location of the see is unknown and since no charters benefitting the minster have survived it is impossible to know what type of patronage, if any, it received.

#### Crowland

The only Mercian saint to have a life written about him within living memory of his death is Guthlac of Crowland. The life was written by an East Anglian monk named Felix sometime during the middle of King Aethelbald's reign.[82]

Felix recorded that Aethelbald visited Crowland when he was in exile during King Ceolred's reign.[83] This would be understandable, since Guthlac was a member of the Mercian royal house.[84]

If Felix's descriptions of the community at Crowland are accurate, then the number of monks living there does not seem to have been large, although Guthlac's personal holiness did attract a number of pilgrims.

Guthlac died in 715, a year before Aethelbald came to the throne. Yet, while Felix does praise the Mercian king for his generosity in constructing a magnificent tomb for the saint,[85] he does not mention any grants of land or privileges given to the monastery founded by his kinsman.

There is a series of charters which are dated from the reigns of Aethelbald, Offa, and Coenwulf benefitting Crowland, but these are such poor twelfth-century forgeries that they are of no use to the historian.[86]

Crowland's history after the death of Guthlac to the time of the Norman conquest is unknown. Orderic Vitalis, who visited the abbey in the eleventh-century, wrote that the monastery had a continuous existence from its foundations and that it even managed to endure the ravages of the Vikings.[87] This seems highly unlikely and Orderic offers no real evidence to support his argument.

The testimony of Domesday Book, however, shows that the abbey did possess most of its estates -those that it is recorded as owning in the later Middle Ages- during the reign of Edward the Confessor.[88] Unfortunately, it is not known when, or how, these lands were acquired.

MEDESHAMSTEDE (Peterborough)

If the abbey's later traditions can be trusted then this monastery was founded during the reign of King Wulfhere of Mercia, perhaps sometime around 664.[89] By King Offa's reign it was almost certainly one of the most important abbeys in Mercia.

In his study of the monastery's pre-Viking age possessions, Sir Frank Stenton showed that a twelfth-century forgery of a grant made by King Aethelred of Mercia was based upon much earlier materials and consequently gave an accurate list of some of the abbey's early estates and daughter houses.[90] The most famous of these colonies was Breedon-on-the-Hill in Leicestershire, but the monastery also held estates as far away as Shropshire and possibly Kent.[91] The monastery of Bardney in Lincolnshire, where King Aethelred retired as a monk, and eventually became abbot, was also a daughter house of Medeshamstede. [92]

In 765, King Offa confirmed a grant of King Egbert II of Kent while he (Offa) was residing at Medeshamstede. [93] The abbot at this time was Botwine, and he appears as a fairly regular witness to charters dating from the first half of Offa's reign. [94]

Botwine's successor appears to have been Beonna. The only genuine eighth-century charter dealing with an estate under Medeshamstede's control is a grant made by him. [95] It is a lease of an estate of 10 hides (manentes) at Swineshead in Lincolnshire to Cuthbert, princeps. For the estate, Cuthbert paid 100 solidi and agreed to render one day's food rent or 30 sicli each year for as long as his family held the land, and, that after their deaths, the estate would return to the monastery. The grant was made with the approval of King Offa and there is no reason to doubt its authenticity.

Beonna, himself, was a regular and frequent witness to diplomas of Offa and those issued early in Coenwulf's reign. [96] Since few abbots witnessed Mercian documents, the regular attestations of both Botwine and

Beonna suggest that Medeshamstede was one of the most important Mercian abbeys.

## VI THE DIOCESE OF LONDON

It is an important question as to whether London should be considered a Mercian diocese or not. The amount of control the Mercian rulers had over the town, in the seventh-century, seems to have increased or diminished depending upon their political fortunes.

From Bede, it is known that Bishop Wine of Winchester purchased the see of London from King Wulfhere, after he had been expelled from his own see by King Cenwealh of Wessex.[97] Bede states that Wine held London for the remainder of his lifetime, which would indicate that Archbishop Theodore was either unwilling or unable to have him removed.

On the other hand, in 675, the year in which King Wulfhere died, Theodore was able to appoint Eorcenwold as bishop.[98] King Ine of Wessex, in his law code, refers to him as "my bishop,"[99] which would indicate that the balance of power, or at least influence, had tipped against Mercia in favour of the West Saxons.

It is generally agreed that by Aethelbald's reign, London and Middlesex were in Mercian hands and they would essentially remain in Mercian control until the late ninth-century. Despite the political reality, the bishop of London does not seem to have been a regular attendant at the Mercian court. The bishops of London did attend synods presided over by the Mercian kings, but rarely did they witness Mercian diplomas that were not related to synods involving the southern bishops.[100]

This would indicate that the bishops of London were able to maintain some type of independence from royal control. This may have been why King Offa found it necessary to grant minting rights to Bishop Eadberht about



the time of the creation of the metropolitan see of Lichfield. However, since the Mercian kings were able to grant commercial rights in London,[101] it seems as if London and Middlesex had become a part of the Mercian kingdom.

No eighth-century charters benefitting St.Pauls, issued by the Mercian kings, have survived. There is however, a series of extracts made by Richard James in the early seventeenth-century, from what were considered to be authentic texts.[102] In this work survive two possible fragments of eighth-century diplomas; one of Aethelbald[103] and one of Offa.[104]

The former, is a grant to Bishop Ingwald of the toll and customs due from one ship in the port of London.[105] James copied a fairly substantial portion of this text and Prof. Whitelock considered it to be authentic.[106] There are several authentic texts which show that such grants were not uncommon[107] and there is nothing suspicious in the surviving portion of the charter.

The diploma of Offa, on the other hand, is another matter. It is a grant of liberties, unspecified in the extract, to St. Paul's.[108] James only preserved a very brief passage of only three lines in the printed text, which makes it impossible to judge the document's authenticity.

The only other royal grant known to have been made in this period is that of minting rights which King Offa gave to Bishop Eadberht.[109] The mint of London seems to have been the largest and most active mint under Mercian control,[110] but the coins struck under the bishop's authority are very rare.[111] This would probably indicate that he received these rights only shortly before the end of his life. Since none of his successors under the Mercian kings acquired this privilege, it would seem that it was only given to him to secure his support for Offa's plans which concerned Lichfield. However, no documentary evidence exists to support this idea, so it must remain pure speculation.

## Westminster

There was a tradition, perhaps dating from the late tenth-century, that both Offa and Coenwulf made grants to this abbey. However, the evidence for this rests upon a series of very dubious charters.

The earliest of these claims to be a grant from Offa of an estate of 10 hides (cassati) at Aldenham in Hertfordshire.[112] For the estate, Westminster is said to have paid the king a sum of 100 mancuses in the form of a gold arm-ring.

This charter is almost certainly a later forgery. It has an extensive Old English boundary clause and the formulas used are not eighth-century in date. Margaret Gelling has suggested that this document may have been created to supply evidence for the dispute between the abbots of Westminster and St.Albans over this estate.[113]

The other grants in this series purport to be from the late tenth- or early eleventh-centuries. They do, however, make references to earlier eighth-century grants.

The best of this group is a charter of King Edgar, in which he grants an estate in London to Westminster.[114] In the diploma there is a passage stating that this same estate had at first been granted to the abbey by King Offa. The charter survives in an early eleventh-century copy and, despite an incorrect date in the dating clause -951 for ?959- and the lack of a witness list, the charter is probably genuine.[115]

The second diploma in the series is another charter of Edgar.[116] In this document the king confirms the liberties and lands of Westminster. The text mentions both Offa and Coenwulf as benefactors of the monastery. Unfortunately, this charter is a later forgery which includes a text of a bull of Pope John (either XII {955-964} or XIII {964-972}).[117]

The final document in the series is a writ of Edward the Confessor which confirms Westminster's ownership of Aldham in Hertfordshire.[118] It also states that the abbey held these estates in the days of Offa and Coenwulf. This writ is also a forgery, probably made in connection with the forged Offan charter mentioned above.

From the genuine charter of Edgar it is probably safe to infer that Westminster did receive some patronage from the Mercian kings. Wilhem Levison has even suggested that since the abbey was dedicated to St. Peter, this would imply that Offa either founded or planned to establish a monastery on the site.[119] This may, in fact, be true, since monasteries founded by Offa's family were usually dedicated to St. Peter.

#### YEADING

Only the foundation charter for this monastery has survived.[120] It is a grant of an estate of 7 hides (manentes) made by King Aethelbald to Withred, comes, and Ansith, Withred's wife. The diploma states that the estate was to be subject to ecclesiastical rule in perpetuity which probably indicates that this was a family monastery.

From the above discussions one can see that very little charter evidence has survived for most of the kingdom of Mercia. Because of the scarcity of the evidence it is impossible to examine each ecclesiastical institution in the manner that was done with Worcester. However, if one looks at the Mercian church as a whole, one can see patterns similar to those at Worcester.

There is not enough surviving charter evidence for the other bishoprics to see if they had more or less freedom than Worcester. Hereford owned two estates within the diocese of Worcester, but it also had to render food rents to the bishop of the Hwicce, an act which would indicate that the estates were still under Worcester's authority.

On the other hand, the bishops of London were not regular witnesses to charters issued by the Mercian rulers. This, however, did not mean that they were not under Mercian authority. In the seventh-century, when London was under Mercian rule, King Wulfhere was able to appoint the bishop of London and the same situation was probably true in the eighth-century. Moreover, the fact that King Coenwulf wished to have the metropolitan see for southern Britain moved from Canterbury to London, would also argue for the bishop as being under Mercian authority.

The subservience of the Mercian episcopate to the monarch can also be seen in King Offa's plan to have Lichfield raised to Metropolitan status. The move does not seem to have been popular, as can be seen from the fact that soon after Offa's death, the archbishopric of Lichfield was demoted to an episcopal see. Yet, Offa was able to convince both the pope and two papal legates that the move was desired by the English episcopate. Such actions could not have been accomplished without the king having the authority to either persuade or force the bishops to support him.

The charter evidence is insufficient to show if any episcopal see controlled estates outside of its diocesan boundaries with the same authority and privileges that it managed for estates within those same boundaries. Since, however, such was not the case with either Worcester or Hereford, it is unlikely to have been so with any of the other bishoprics.

The situation may have been somewhat different with monasteries. Medeshamstede had several daughter houses outside of the diocese of Lindsey, most notably Breedon-on-the-Hill. However, while the abbot of Medeshamstede was an important figure at the Mercian court, how much authority he exercised over his abbey's daughter houses is unknown.

It must be remembered that an abbot was not a bishop. Medeshamstede may well have been one of the wealthiest of the southern monasteries, but the authority of its abbot would never have equalled that of a bishop.

One final point, which the surviving charters, as discussed above, demonstrate, is the authority of the king. None of the charters discussed was issued without royal authority. This demonstrates the Church's dependence upon the monarchy as the source of its wealth. The king was the highest earthly authority in Mercia and if the Church wished to have continual control over its estates it needed royal support and authority.

[1] S.85 (7727).

[2] S.51 (676).

[3] H.P.R. Finberg, The Early Charters of the West Midlands, 2nd. ed. (Leicester, 1972), pp.172-174.

[4] S.120 (780) and S.1257 (781); on the dates of these diplomas, see above, Ch. 2, n.73.

[5] S.265 (757x758). This charter was ascribed to King Coenwulf of Mercia by a later copiest, but the witness list confirms it as a West Saxon diploma.

[6] See Ch. 2 above.

[7] S.120.

[8] S.1257.

[9] S.1187.

[10] S.139 (793x796).

[11] ASC. s.a. 807, and Florence of Worcester, s.a.807.

[12] S.143 (824).

[13] S.218.

[14] S.141 (768x779).

[15] S.117.

[16] ECWM. 208.

[17] S.109.

[18] S.117.

[19] S.116 (780).

[20] S.54. This charter is a post-Conquest forgery.

[21] S.78 (708), S.79 (709), and S.80 (709).

[22] S.81 (710).

[23] S.1251.

[24] S.83.

[25] S.97 (716x717).

[26] See D. Hooke, "The Droitwich Salt Industry: An Examination of the West Midland Charter Evidence," Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History 2(1981), pp.123-169.

[27] S.54.

[28] Finberg (1972), pp.153-166.

[29] ECWM. 212 (716x757).

[30] ECWM. 24 (735x757).

[31] S.1782. This is a list of benefactors of Gloucester, it is undated but was probably drawn up in the late mediaeval period.

[32] ECWM. 45 (777x790).

[33] S.1782.

[34] Ibid.

[35] At Hartpury in Gloucestershire, ECWM. 27 (757x796).

[36] S.154 (799). F.M. Stenton, The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period (Oxford, 1955), pp.27-28, argued that the surviving form of this document is based upon a genuine charter, but he believed that there had been later alterations. His chief problem was with the dating clause. The document is dated 799, indiction 7, "in the year when peace was made between the Mercians and the West Saxons under Kings Coenwulf and Egbert." Stenton pointed out that while 7 was the correct indiction for 799, Egbert did not become king of Wessex until 802. However, H.P.R. Finberg (1972), p.97, has suggested that the charter is genuine. He notes that the name Egbert (ECBERT) was probably a copiest's mistake for Beorhtric (BERHTRIC), who ruled Wessex from 786 to 802.

[37] S.786. The authenticity of this diploma has been questioned. W.H. Stevenson changed his mind about it several times; see Two Cartularies of the Benedictine Abbeys of Muchelney and Athelney in the County of Somerset, ed. E.H. Bates, Somerset Record Society 14(1899), p.42, Asser's Life of King Alfred, ed. W.H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), p.202n.3, and "Yorkshire Surveys and Other Eleventh-Century Documents in the York Gospels," EHR 27(1912), p.6n.17. Finberg (1972), p.59, considered it to be an original diploma. D. Whitelock, in a personal comment to S., found it to be suspicious.

[38] For example: S.1187 (804), S.161 (805), S.163 (808), and S.165 (811).

[39] S.1436.

[40] W. Levison, England and the Continent in the Eighth Century (Oxford, 1946), p.249.

[41] CS.337 (811).

[42] S.167.

[43] CS.337.

[44] Levison (1946), p.32, considers it to be authentic.

[45] S.167.

[46] Levison (1946), 253-254.

[47] S.1861 (796x821).



- [48] S.94 (716x737).
- [49] See Hooke (1981).
- [50] F.M. Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England, 3rd. ed. (Oxford, 1971), p.134.
- [51] Ibid., p.46.
- [52] S.99.
- [53] Finberg (1972), p36.
- [54] S.1431 (803). The charter is also discussed in Ch. 2 above.
- [55] Stenton (1971), pp.214-215.
- [56] See for example, Bede, HE iv.3 and v.23.
- [57] The correspondence is printed in HS. pp.518-521, 523-525.
- [58] See C.E. Blunt, "The Coinage of Offa," in Anglo-Saxon Coins, ed. R.H.M. Dolley (London, 1961), pp.43-44, and D. Whitelock, Some Anglo-Saxon Bishops of London, The Chambers Memorial Lecture (London, 1975), p.13.
- [59] The record of the synod, CS.250, mentions nothing about the raising of Lichfield to metropolitan status, but the correspondence from Coenwulf's reign states that this is when the action was taken.
- [60] William of Malmesbury, De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum (Rolls Series), ed. N. Hamilton (London, 1870), p.16.
- [61] For Canterbury's estates, see N. Brooks, The Early History of the Church of Canterbury (Leicester, 1984), pp.100-107, 129-142.
- [62] See Bede, HE 1.29.
- [63] CS.310 and HS., pp.542-544.
- [64] Finberg (1972), pp.207, 217-220.
- [65] Printed in Finberg (1972), pp.201-204.
- [66] An abbot Eobe witnesses S.94 (716x737), or he could also have been the Oba who witnesses Aethelbald's charters from S.97 (716x717) to S.91 (c.748), but this is unlikely since Oba seems to have been a lay noble. Cynric's attestations appear on three of Aethelbald's diplomas: S.84 (?727), S.86 (?733), and S.87 (?733). Their periods of witnessing combined with those of the bishops would place this grant sometime between c.727 and c.736.
- [67] S.221 (901).
- [68] ASC. s.a. 757, Chron. E., p.331, Finberg (1972), p.218, and M. Biddle and B. Kjolbye-Biddle, "The Repton Stone," ASE 14(1985), pp.233-292.
- [69] Felix, VG. 20

[70] F.M. Stenton, "Medeshamstede and its Colonies," in CP, pp. 182-185.

[71] S.1805 (675x682), and also A. Dornier, "The Anglo-Saxon Monastery at Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire," in Mercian Studies, ed. A. Dornier (Leicester, 1977), p.153, and A. Rumble, "'Hrepingas' Reconsidered," in Ibid., pp.169-172.

[72] Bede, HE v.23.

[73] See F.M. Stenton, "St. Frideswide and her Times," in CP, pp.224-233.

[74] S.138 (792).

[75] M. Gelling, The Early Charters of the Thames Valley (Leicester, 1979), p.72.

[76] S.136 (793).

[77] S.150 (796) and S.151 (796).

[78] S.888 (996).

[79] S.912.

[80] S.916 (1007).

[81] Aldfrith, the last recorded king of Lindsey attests S.1183 (772x787).

[82] The Life was requested by King AElfwald of East Anglia (c713-749), so it must have been written before the king's death, see Felix, VG prologue.

[83] Felix, VG 49.

[84] Ibid. 2.

[85] Ibid. 51.

[86] S.82 (716), S.135 (793), S.162 (808), and S.1189 (810).

[87] OV iv.11.280-281.

[88] F.M. Page, The Estates of Crowland Abbey (Cambridge, 1934), p.4.

[89] See S.68 (664), a forged charter of King Wulfhere.

[90] Stenton, "Medeshamstede..." in CP, pp.179-192.

[91] Ibid., pp.180-181.

[92] Ibid. and Bede, HE v.19 and v.24.

[93] S.39 (765).

[94] See for example: S.105 (764), S.111 (774), and S.141 (768x779).

[95] S.1412 (787x796).

- [96] See for example: S.130 (789), S.146(793x796), and S.155 (799).
- [97] Bede, HE iii.7.
- [98] Ibid. iv.6.
- [99] Ine, Introduction.
- [100] Whitelock (1975), p.13.
- [101] S.86 (?733), S.87 (?733), S.88(734), S.91 (748), S.98 (743x745), and S.143 (759x764). All of these diplomas are grants of the taxation due from ships in the port of London.
- [102] Printed in Early Charters of the Cathedral of St. Paul, London, ed. M. Gibbs, Camden, 3rd. series 58(1939), pp.1-8.
- [103] S.1788 (716x745).
- [104] S.1790 (757x796).
- [105] S.1788.
- [106] Whitelock, EHD, p.488.
- [107] See above, n.101.
- [108] S.1790.
- [109] See above, n.58.
- [110] C.E. Blunt, et al., "The Coinage of Southern England, 796-840," BNJ 32(1963), pp.5-10, 30-36, and I. Stewart, "The London Mint and the Coinage of Offa," in Anglo-Saxon Monetary History, ed. M.A.S. Blachburn (Leicester, 1986), pp.27-44.
- [111] Stewart (1986), p.42, notes that only six coins are known. A seventh, was discovered in Kent in 1986, see Numismatic Circular 90(1987), no.1354.
- [112] S.124 (785).
- [113] Gelling (1979), p.80.
- [114] S.670 (?959).
- [115] A.S. Napier and W.H. Stevenson, Crawford Collection of Early Charters and Documents (Oxford, 1895), p.90.
- [116] S.774 (969).
- [117] Napier and Stevenson (1895), pp.88-95.
- [118] S.1122 (1045x1049).
- [119] Levison (1946), p.31.
- [120] S.100 (716x757).

## CONCLUSION

As the reader has seen from the discussions above, the amount of charter evidence for the kingdom of Mercia is relatively small and unevenly spread among the ecclesiastical centres. It is unfortunate that most of the evidence for ecclesiastical activity comes from the diplomas. These documents tell one little, if anything, about the careers of churchmen before they came to high ecclesiastical office. Thus, while it can be suggested that it was the king who appointed clerics to fill vacant sees, there is little evidence that directly states that the Mercian kings actually did so.

The same situation is true with monasteries. It is unlikely that the king had any say, or for that matter, any interest, in who became the abbot of small family monasteries such as Kidderminster or Berkeley. However, it is possible that royal approval may have been necessary for the election of an abbot or abbess to an important monastery such as Medeshamstede, but there is no evidence to show if this was, or was not, the case.

It is because of the nature of the surviving evidence that many questions about the relationship between the Mercian kings and the Church are unanswerable. Nevertheless, the diplomatic evidence for the church of Worcester is substantial enough to suggest some assertions about the relationship between the bishop and the king.

From the evidence of the charters, it would appear that, at first, the Church depended upon the king as its chief patron. The Church desired land which it would be able to hold in perpetuity, the only source of such land was the king. There are no eighth-century examples of anyone, from either the Church or the lay nobility, granting land in perpetuity without the approval of the king.

Grants of land were made between unequals, with the lesser part receiving from the greater. Thus, in order to receive grants, the Church would have had to subordinate itself to the monarchy. Nevertheless, it is not known if this situation continued throughout the entire eighth-century. There is no way of knowing how much land was given to the Church by the Mercian kings. The charter evidence suggests that Worcester had substantial holdings within the province of the Hwicce, but it is impossible to compare the church's holdings with those of the royal dynasty. It is certainly possible that, with more land being alienated with each successive reign, royal power and influence may have been reduced over the long term.

In the eighth-century, however, it would appear as if the king had an important voice in church affairs. The Mercian kings were regular attendants at church councils, and the fact that they regularly witnessed the documents issued at these synods would suggest that their approval was indeed necessary.

Another example of this concerns the establishment of the archbishopric of Lichfield. It was King Offa who wished the metropolitan see created and it was he who opened negotiations with the papacy. The evidence would suggest that the English clergy were reluctant to follow his lead, but through persuasion, or force, the king was able to secure their support.

The same situation was true in King Coenwulf's reign. The negotiations with the papacy over Lichfield's reduction were conducted by the king and his representatives. Coenwulf attended the synod at Clofeshoh which reduced Lichfield back to episcopal status and also witnessed the document which recorded the act.

Nevertheless, while the Mercian kings did attend synods their presence may not always have been necessary. King Aethelbald was not at the council which settled the dispute between Hrothwaru and her mother over the abbey of Withington. In the eighth-century, royal government was very much a personal thing. The king was strongest wherever he was at any particular moment. Most government must have occurred at the local level with little, if any, royal interference. How much influence the king had over great local magnates, such as the bishop of Worcester, is difficult to ascertain.

In 794, King Offa forced his comes, Bynna, to return an estate to Worcester which the comes had seized. However, in 789, the church of Worcester had to come to an agreement with Wulfheard, over the two estates which the layman had illegally usurped. King Offa witnessed the document which states that Wulfheard was to have the lands for his lifetime. This may indicate that Offa was either unwilling, or unable, to secure for Worcester estates which rightfully belonged to the church.

The same situation can be found in Coenwulf's reign. The abbey of Berkeley was able to hold on to an estate which should have gone to Worcester in 807. However, it was not until 824 that Worcester was able to take possession of the estate. This also might indicate limitations of royal authority at the local level.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, it is probable that in the eighth-century the Church was subservient to the monarchy, at least to some extent. King Offa was able to prevent Worcester from annexing the abbey of Bath in 781. More importantly, it seems to have been a royal policy to confine grants of land, to the bishopric of Worcester, to estates within the diocese; and, it is quite likely that a similar policy applied to the other Mercian bishoprics.

Also, royal authority was the Church's best protection against illegal actions by the local lay nobility. The king may not always have been able to protect the Church from the greed of local magnates, but he may have been able to help reach a settlement in which the Church would eventually have had its lands restored.

Thus, we can see that the Mercian church benefitted from the patronage of the Mercian kings. In return for grants of land and immunities, the Church probably rendered some type of service to the king, most likely in the form of acting as a local scriptorium and storage area for royal documents. Thus, to one degree or another, the Church must have subordinated itself to the monarchy. However, because of the nature and scarcity of the evidence it is impossible for one to have more than a general idea of the limits of royal and ecclesiastical power.



## APPENDIX

### Estates and Immunities Acquired by the Church of Worcester, 716-821

The following is a list of all estates and immunities known to have been acquired by the church of Worcester during the period covered by this dissertation. All grants were made either by the Mercian kings or with their approval. Only estates listed in authentic charters are given.

The following symbols are used: io - only immunities granted; the estate was acquired at an earlier date. () - dates within parenthesis are the date that the grant was made. [] - dates within brackets are the date that the estate was acquired if it is different from the date of the grant.

location of estate	no. of hides (if known)	charter & date
AETHELBALD, 716-757		
Worcestershire:		
Bredon	12	S.1257(781)[716x757]
Coolberg		S.102(716x717)
Lootwic		S.102(716x717)
Stratford-on-Avon	30	S.1257(781)[716x757]
Sture	38	S.1257(781)[716x757]
Gloucestershire:		
Aston Blank	20	S.99(737x740)[pre-757]
Aust	5	S.137(794)[716x757]
Batsford		S.101(727x736)
Notgrove	20	S.99(737x740)[pre-757]
Woodchester	3	S.103(716x745)
OFFA, 757-796		
Worcestershire:		
Stour in Ismere	14	S.1411(757x775)
Wick Episcopi		S.142(757x775)
Gloucestershire:		
Henbury I	20	S.1411(757x775)
Henbury II	20	S.146(793x796)
Westbury-on-Trym	60	S.146(793x796)
Withington	20	S.1429(736x737)[743x774]
Warwickshire:		
Faehha leage io	5	S.120(780)
Hampton Lucy io	12	S.120(780)
Tredington		S.55(757)
COENWULF, 796-821		
Worcestershire:		
Chaddesley Corbett io	25	S.180(816)
Dunhampstead	1	S.174(814)

Fladbury	30	S.185(814)
Hallow io	30	S.180(816)
Sluhforda	3	S.182(817)
Spetchley io		S.180(816)
Tolladine io		S.180(816)
Whittington io		S.180(816)
Worcester io		S.172(814)
Gloucestershire:		
Sture	8	S.171(814)

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